


*The
Parson of Panamint*



Peter B. Kyne

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The
PARSON OF PANAMINT
and Other Stories

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BY

PETER B. KYNE

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TO MY FATHER

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The
PARSON OF PANAMINT
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The Parson of Panamint

I HAD been prospecting with Chuckwalla Bill in the Coso Range, working eastward out of Darwin into the desolate region stretching away toward Death Valley. Along in the late afternoon we passed through a rocky defile and emerged into a sage flat about a mile square hemmed in by naked red buttes; and shortly thereafter I commenced to make frequent discoveries in the stunted sage of ancient, rust-corroded tin cans. These indicating that we were approaching a camp, I mentioned my suspicions to Chuckwalla Bill.

"Yes," he replied dully; "we're gettin' right close to Panamint."

We pressed slowly onward, herding the burros before us, and at sunset we came on the camp. Chuckwalla Bill saw it first.

"There's Panamint," he said, pointing; and added: "Philip's church is gone at last."

I gazed ahead into the violet shadows trooping up the valley and beheld a huge heap of rusty tin cans of assorted sizes, similar to those we had passed earlier in the day. They were scattered over nearly an acre of ground and piled to a depth of several feet; wherefore, in the absence of other sign of human habitation, past or present, I was not long in fixing the exact geographical locus of Panamint. It lay in the heart of old Chuckwalla Bill, as his next remark fully convinced me.

"I was mayor o' that city oncet," he said wistfully,

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and recited an extemporaneous paraphrase of an old poem:

“Her picks is rust;
Her bones is dust
It’s thirty years since she went bust.

Son, let’s crack along over to the foot o’ Amethyst Avenoo an’ bed down for the night at Jake Russell’s well.”

After supper he told me this tale of the Parson of Panamint.

Yes, sir [began Chuckwalla Bill] I make the first strike in these parts, an’ when I pack back to Darwin for more grub an’ dynamite, an’ show my samples, I start a stampede. In six months we have a city three thousand strong, not countin’ Injuns an’ Greasers, of which we have our share in them days. Panamint’s a silver camp, an’ all this I’m goin’ to tell you is pulled off before silver gets demonetized an’ silver mines so far from everywhere as Panamint can’t be worked no more at a profit, which is why Panamint goes bust. An’ when a minin’ camp goes bust oncet, she’s got a black eye forever an’ don’t revive nohow. Besides, we don’t have much water in Panamint; an’ that’s a drawback. Teamin’ water in from Darwin runs up the cost o’ livin’ too high, with silver down to sixty-seven.

Son, my tomato cans is the first on that dump—an’ the last. I stake out the Panamint Lily, an’ a dozen good claims besides, before ever I tip off the news o’ my strike; an’ then I sell the Lily for five hundred thousand cash an’ lease my other claims on a good royalty. I cal’late mebbe I’m worth at the time a coupler million dollars; so nachelly I can’t see my way clear to labor none, an’ I look round for a hobby.

I find her in Panamint.

Son, Panamint's my sweetheart. I'm raisin' thirty years at the time, full o' blue blood an' conceit, like a barber's cat; an' folks takes to callin' me the Father o' Panamint. Nachelly, me bein' responsible for the camp, as the feller says, I'm prouder'n a roadrunner of it.

I get to dreamin' big dreams o' the future o' Panamint, an' I sink a deal o' money in local real estate, start a bank, import a printin' press an' an editor, an' a rig to drill for water; an', in general, I get behind Panamint with my personality an' my bank roll, an' boost the municipality.

I reckon we're about eight months old, an' growin' like a stall-fed calf, when Hank Bartlett—Hank's a scholar an' a gentleman, an' I stake him to a daily paper called the Panamint Nugget, an' subsidize him till he's on a payin' basis—writes an editorial advocatin' the incorporation o' the camp as a regular city.

The idee's a hummer an' I get back of it right off; so we incorporate Panamint an' I run for mayor agin a party by the name o' Jedge Tarbox.

The jedge 'lows as how his record in the Civil War's bound to help him; but I'm the daddy o' Panamint, an' I'm swept into office—me an' my ticket—by such a majority the jedge comes out with a signed article in the Nugget apologizin' for livin', an' moves to make it unanimous. I'm so proud o' that ol' warrior I give the city-attorney-elect a thousand dollars to resign his office so's I can app'int Jedge Tarbox in his place.

As I remarks previous, I'm all wrapped up in Panamint. I'm plannin' to make her the biggest silver camp in the West an' advancin' her interests every way I know how, so, right after I'm sworn in as mayor, me

an' Hank Bartlett puts our heads together an' holds a potlatch.

As a result Hank writes an editorial callin' for a mass meetin' to advocate the three things the camp's got to have if she's goin' to press for'd to her destiny. Them three things is a town hall, a schoolhouse an' a church; for, though Panamint's a camp with the hair on her—an' I wouldn't give a damn to be mayor o' no other kind—still, there's plenty o' women an' children, an' good, solid citizens with us already, an' more willin' to come if we give 'em the things they're used to in more cultivated sections that lies closer to water an' railroads.

Well, son, we hold that mass meetin', an' Hank Bartlett makes a speech that shore gets the money. Me, I ain't never what the feller calls silver-tongued, but I make a brief talk, nevertheless, to sorter back up Hank's play an' give it official sanction. Then I call for subscriptions to the buildin' fund, an' as mayor I start the ball rollin' with ten thousand dollars an' pledge the camp treasury for five more if the citizens at large'll make up the rest. We're askin' for fifty thousand dollars until Panamint's on a self-supportin' basis; an' in half an hour I have it and the committees are app'inted.

It's sixty days before we get the lumber freighted in from Mojave, an' the church an' the schoolhouse up. Meantime Hank Bartlett, whose handwritin' is somethin' to admire, has wrote to the state superintendent o' schools askin' him to send us a bang-up schoolmarm, which the super done; an' as I remember she was right satisfactory. Also, the Committee on Reeligion—which I'm the committee—has pulled out for San Francisco to round up a preacher, aimin' to come back with him about the time the parsonage is up.

Now this question of a preacher's been worryin' me no little. We got a coupler Jews in commercial lines, an' some Irish Catholics; but, by an' large, the bulk o' the population o' Panamint is Protestant. We got Methodists an' Baptists an' Congregationalists an' Mormons an' Unitarians an' Episcopal, an' what-all; but I figure it out as how all these here sects nachelly comes under the same general head, an' one good, bang-up parson that don't stir up no secular strife is shore bound to please all hands.

Pers'nally I don't have no more ree-ligious convictions than a tarantula, but, all the same, I don't lose sight o' the fact that ree-ligion is a heap o' comfort to a lot o' people; so nachelly I'm careful in makin' my selection. I'm the butt end of a month sortin' over parsons an' conferrin' with bishops, lookin' for a big, broad-gage young feller that don't take his ree-ligion too hard; for I realize that a parson with the ingrown' brand o' faith ain't goin' to be popular in Panamint. As I say, she's a camp with the hair on her, but her heart's right an' she means well; an' all a feller has to do is overlook a few things that are peculiar to boom camps an' can't be helped nohow.

Son, that time I put in lookin' for my ideal of a preacher is about the hardest three weeks I'm ever through. My previous experience with parsons an' bishops is limited; an', havin' allers been used to a free range an' free speech, I suppose I don't make a hit with a lot of them. They're all a-wonderin' what Panamint looks like if I'm her mayor, I guess; an' none of 'em is inclined to take a chance, even if I let 'em, which I do not, because I don't see none that measures up to my standards. I'm plumb discouraged when Fate, as the feller says, bumps me up agin the Reverend Philip Pharo. We meet this way:

There's a strike on in the mee-tropolis while I'm there preacher-prospectin'. I'm leavin' the Occidental Hotel for a little *pasar* up Montgomery Street when I'm aware o' some excitement. A feller comes chargin' down the street to beat four of a kind, with mebbe a dozen men a-chasin' him an' yellin': "Scab! Scab! Kill the scab!"

Now, son, I'm not interested a little bit in this round-up. In Panamint it's the custom to let every man roll his own hoop; an' as this fugitive is makin' fast headway, I don't feel called on to interfere, particularly as it looks to me like there's goin' to be a heap o' yellin' an' no killin'. In consequence I'm a mite surprised when a half a brick reaches the runner in the back o' the head an' he falls almost in front o' me.

"That mob'll kick him to death," says a voice alongside o' me; an' a young feller jumps past me, grabs the victim by the collar an' drags him into a doorway, where they can't get at him. Then he faces the mob with his fists an' drops the first two men that closes in on him.

Son, I'm a fightin' tarantula in them days. There ain't nothin' I won't tackle, once the play is up to me fair; an' it gravis me to see a dozen men pickin' on one. Also it pleases me to see the businesslike way this interferin' stranger faces the music, a-knowin' they're goin' to tromp him to death an' make a rag baby out o' him in half a minute; so while they're swarmin' over him I'm gettin' out my artillery an' fixin' to help the young feller out a little.

Before they can get him down I'm wadin' into the riot, tampin' sociable left an' right with my weepin'; an' in half a minute me an' this young stranger ee-merges from the conflict, bloody but victorious, an' in the hands of a dozen policemen.

They take my gun away from me, which I'm too law-abidin' to object, an' then we're took to a hospital an' patched up, though there ain't nothin' serious wrong with either of us. We got forty fights left in us yet. From the hospital we're taken to the police station, where the young feller's booked for incitin' a riot, with his bail fixed at five hundred dollars; an' me—son, I'm charged with assault with a deadly weepson. The arrestin' officer says as how I'm a gun-fighter an' a dangerous character, an' they make my bail a thousand dollars.

I can see my feller criminal is staggered at this state of affairs, but it's plumb amusin' to me. I have a money belt under my shirt next my skin, which I hauls her out an' counts out fifteen hundred dollars on the counter.

"Gimme a receipt," I says. "This young friend o' mine is John J. Jones, an' I'm Chuckwalla Bill Redfield, mayor o' Panamint, which Panamint's the biggest-feelin' camp on earth." I'm that patriotic nothin' can keep me from advertisin' Panamint.

So the officer takes us to another feller at a desk, an' he rakes in my fifteen hundred, gives me separate receipts, an' tells us to come back for trial in the mornin'.

When we're safe outside the police station the young feller thanks me kindly. He says if I'm not there with his bail money he'd shore have been disgraced.

"Which you're a fightin' bobcat, young feller," I says, "an' I'm proud to have been arrested with you." Then I interduced myself; an' I learn his name is Philip Pharo.

"Mr. Redfield, I had no call to drag you into this mess," he says, "only I can't bear to see murder done."

"Same here," I says, "only call me Chuckwalla or Bill. I been mighty lonesome in this here city an' if you call me by my Christian name I'll feel more to

home. Down in Panamint we got a vacancy for a preacher, an' I'm here to round one up if I can ever find one to fit the job."

"Why, Chuckwalla," he says, "I'm a minister o' the Gospel."

"The hell you are!" I says. "You don't fight like one."

"I'm brand-new," he says grinnin'. "I'm only ordained yesterday, an' I'm on my way to a tailor's to be measured for a parson's suit when I feel myself called on to save the life o' that unfortunate scab. Now, if I'm fined or jailed for incitin' a riot I can't get that suit, an' mebbe the bishop'll call a conference an' heave me out o' the church."

"Philip," I says, "if the bishop does that I'll shore make him hard to catch. However, don't you worry, because you ain't goin' to have to stand trial. We'll just nachelly jump our bail."

The young feller give a laugh that would have warmed the heart of a banker.

"Why, I won't hear to it, nohow," he says. "You'll lose fifteen hundred dollars."

"It won't be the first fifteen hundred I've lost," I says. "I ain't worryin' about that. I'm richer'n a fool, an' can afford it. What I ain't bankin' on is havin' a black mark unjustly chalked up agin the only red-blooded parson I've seen in three weeks. To hell with the money!"

"Chuckwalla," he says, "you're immense!"

"Let's talk about you, Philip," I says. To save my soul I can't call him parson. He's too much like a friend. "Be you lookin' for a job preachin' the Gospel?"

"I shore am," he says. "Do you reckon I could fill that vacancy you mention?"

"Well," I says, "I'm the mayor o' Panamint, daddy o' the camp an' the Committee on Ree-ligion; an' what I say goes or I'll know the reason why. I've looked over a lot o' parsons, but they don't grade high enough for Panamint; an' though you look mighty good to me, still there's a chance that Panamint don't grade high enough for you. She's a minin' camp that ain't had the edges knocked off her yet, an' it's only fair I should warn you before talkin' terms."

"Chuckwalla," he says, layin' his hand on my arm like he'd knowed me all his life, "I'm out to preach the Gospel, an' I don't care a hoot in a hollow where I preach it. That's me!"

Son, I'm overcome.

"Philip," I says, "suppose me an' you go somewhere while we talk this thing over."

"All right," he says; an' we went over to the Palace Hotel restauraw an' sat down to discuss the matter.

The Reverend Pharo he has a glass o' buttermilk an' I have some red liquor, to which he don't offer no objections an' tell me a lot o' things about red liquor that I know already a durned sight better'n him. I chalk a white mark up to him for that, an' then I put him through his examination.

"Philip," I says, "do you believe in hell?"

"Well, Chuckwalla, my friend," he says, "the constitution an' by-laws o' my church recognizes it, but there ain't no orthodox hell; an' the first time I get up in a pulpit I'm going to say so."

"On what grounds do you base them views?"

"On common sense. Our Lord can't take enjoyment in fryin' people. It's agin all the compassion He showed to human bein's while He was here on earth."

"How many roads is there to heaven?" I says.

"So blamed many, Chuckwalla, it's no wonder a lot

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of us get lost in transit. The Bible says: 'In my Father's house there is many mansions.' An' I guess there's enough spare rooms for all of us, Jew an' Gentile, if we play the game o' life square with ourselves."

"Philip," I says, "the job's your'n if you'll take it; an' if you don't take it I'm goin' to set right here an' get drunk an' drown my sorror."

"I'll take it," he says, "providin' the bishop is willin'. I suppose my congregation'll approve your choice o' parson?"

"I dunno," I says; "an' what's more, I don't give a goddam. I know what's good for Panamint, an' if they reject you I'll build another church at my own expense an' run 'em out o' business. All I know is you're my parson, providin' you ain't a Baptist."

"No, Chuckwalla," he says, "I ain't. You got a grudge agin the Baptists?"

"I shore ain't no bigot," I says; "but we got to haul our water in bar'ls twelve mile to camp." He laughed himself into a fit at that.

"Chuckwalla," he says, "I repeat it—you're immense! I love you like a brother."

Then we talked salary, an' I offered him five hundred, which he says, as shy as a sheep-killin' dog, five hundred ain't quite enough, an' the very least he can get along on is seven hundred. I'm embarrassed a heap to think mebbe I've showed Panamint in the light o' bein' cheap an' small in money matters, an' I tell him, in order to be safe, I'll guarantee him a thousand; the congregation can fix the regular rate, an' I'll make up the dee-ficit personally.

Thinkin' to ease his mind on the financial question I draw a check on the Panamint Bank & Trust Company for a thousand and give to to him. "There, Philip," I says, "is your first month's salary in advance."

"Month!" he yells. "You frontier comedian, I'm talkin' about years!" An' he laughs so long an' hearty the head waiter comes over an' tells us we'll have to be quiet or git out. "Why, bless your heart, Chuckwalla," Philip continues, "a hundred a month is princely as preacher's salaries goes in the country!"

"Then," I says "the good Lord help them in the city, for nine-tenths o' the preachers I see are that grave an' solemn I got a notion they're worried over money matters; but you're different. I got a notion mebbe sometime I'll come to church an' listen to you preach."

"Well, Chuckwalla," he says, "don't do nothin' that hurts you, unless it happens to be the right thing to do. An' now," he says, "I'll go an' explain my damaged appearance to the bishop an' talk it all over with him." Which he done; an' in two hours he's back an' I have his final acceptance.

We start right out shoppin'. First I buy me a new gun, because I don't feel dressed up since the police take my other gun away from me; an' then we buy a big, bang-up organ for the church. That's my gift an' it costs me close to two thousand. Also, I buys the hymn books, etcetry; an' I make Philip pick out the fixin's an' furnishin's for his parsonage himself. I aim to make him comfortable, an' I have a heap o' difficulty convincin' him he's headed for Panamint, where the best ain't none too good; an' most likely, at that, it's regarded with suspicion!

While we're shoppin' I learn a heap about Philip. He's got no kin; an', as near as I can make out, his pa leaves him just about enough to educate him an' clothe him till he's twenty-one. He's been through a big Eastern college an' has a string o' letters after his name like the tail of a comet. He's probably the most wholesome, handsomest young feller I ever meet, an' when it comes

to sand he's got more o' that commodity in his craw than a grizzly bear. He's as good-natured as a baby an' laughin' all the time he's with me. Durned if I see what he finds to laugh at, unless it's mebbe because I treat him like he's a pin-feather boy. I'm five year older'n him in p'int o' years; but in p'int of experience with life I'm dyin' of old age compared with Philip.

Well, when everything is bought an' the shippin' instructions given, me an' Philip lights out for San José, so the police won't ketch us on a bench warrant for jumpin' our bail next day. In San José we patronize an expensive tailor, an' when our clothes are ready we head for Panamint.

We don't make no noise comin' into town, for I'm dead set agin this Wild West hip!-hip!-hurrah! business every time some sucker wins a big pot. We put up at the hotel while waitin' for the furnishin's for the parsonage an' the organ to be freighted in, an' I take Philip around an' interduce him to everybody in Panamint. He's received with favor an' I'm complimented a heap on my jedgment.

It's mebbe two weeks before the freight gets in, but during that time Philip organizes his congregation with a membership roll, an' the congregation gets together an' elects a governin' board, called the elders. As near as I recollect there's a dozen o' these elders. I don't favor the notion nohow, bein' dead set agin anybody bossin' Philip; but as I ain't a member o' the church an' don't intend to be, an' as it's Philip's game, I figger he knows what he's up to, an' that there ain't no call for me to horn in on the play. If I'd knowed as much about elders as I do now I'd have named a slate an' put Philip up to an opposition ticket.

The elders is all composed o' the solid citizens o' the town. The presidin' elder is an old silvertip by the name

o' Absalom Randall. Absalom's been clerkin' in a country bank in Kansas about twenty year, an' when I organized the Panamint Bank & Trust Company one o' the directors recommends him for the job o' vice-president an' manager, particular since Absalom's got five thousand dollars he's willin' to invest in the stock.

I'm for him on account of his bankin' experience, which is why he gets the job. I'm president myself, but I don't take no interest in the bank's affairs. I leave that to hirelin's, as I'm never inside the bank except to draw checks agin my own account; which, lookin' back at it all now, 'pears to me I all but lived in front o' the payin' teller's winder.

The super o' the Panamint Lily, an' the druggist, an' some leadin' merchants an' family men makes up the rest o' the list; but Absalom Randall, he sticks out in my memory most. He shore was a ornery old side-winder.

Well, son, I don't make no mistake in pickin' the Reverend Philip Pharo. The first Sunday the house is packed, an' Philip's sermon is a snorter. Also, he takes occasion to pass out a few complimentary remarks about me, which if I'm in church when he makes 'em I'd have been embarrassed.

The Almighty's just cut Philip out for a minin'-camp parson, an' filled him up with love for his feller man. It ain't no time before that boy is workin' himself sick doin' things for the unfortunates that romps into every minin' camp, where they promptly find themselves unfit and bog down, sick an' busted.

We've built him a nice little five-room parsonage up on Amethyst Avenoo—son, we're settin' in his back yard right now—but he never gets to enjoy it none. Right off he digs up a busted Cousin Jack miner that's been leaded, an' a tin-horn gambler dyin' o' consump-

tion, an' houses 'em at the parsonage, after which he installs a drunken old bandit answerin' to the name o' Crabapple Thompson, an' nominates Crabapple chief cook an' head nurse.

"Philip," I says, when I spot Crabapple Thompson on the premises, an' me knowin' his capacity for red liquor, "fire this here attendant o' your'n an' I'll round you up a responsible party."

"No, Chuckwalla," he says; "Crabapple needs me worse'n I need him. If he's round where I can keep my eye on him he'll stay in line. Besides, I like the old sinner. There's a heap o' character in Crabapple when you catch him sober."

Well, I seen there wasn't no use arguin' with him, particular after he says:

"Chuckwalla, did you ever notice how prone a lot o' preachers is to surround themselves with respectable people an' visit round among the congregation, an' make themselves agreeable to agreeable people?"

"No," I says; "I ain't had no experience that way. You're the first parson I ever see on the job—that is, at close range."

"Well," he says, "it's a fact. A lot o' my worthy brethren seem to have an idee that fellers like Crabapple Thompson an' that there consumptive gambler is the legitimate prey o' so-called settlement workers an' public institootions. I don't subscribe to them theories. I'm a-tryin' to foller in His steps. He went round healin' the sick an' bein' kind to sinners, an' mixin' up with the lowly o' the earth, regardless. Chuckwalla, good people don't need my services; an' so long as I'm the parson o' Panamint I don't aim to spend my time drinkin' tea with the ladies of the congregation, or walkin' round hand-shakin' myself into popularity. I ain't been here long, but I can see already

I got a real he-job in this camp an' I'm not goin' to be no kid-glove preacher. Sinners is too thick here for me to waste my time in social frivolity."

I've hardly left him before a faro dealer in the Pick an' Drill, feelin' jealous o' his light-o'-love, shoots the lady up somethin' scandalous. It's four days before I learn Philip has the unfortunate up at the parsonage. Me, I've got that many things to think of, I've forgot to rig up a hospital; an' as nobody seems anxious to care for this here gal, Buckskin Liz, why, the parson has her toted up to the parsonage. He gives up his own bed to the critter, while he takes a blanket an' goes over to the church nights, aimin' to roost in the organ loft. As soon as I find this out I have Buckskin Liz moved out to Darwin, to the Miners' Hospital.

Now, of course, like all lovable, good-natured boys, Philip ain't in camp a week till there's forty corn-fed girls out to rope him. They're pesterin' the boy to such an extent that it takes him two hours to get to the post office an' back. While he's got Buckskin Liz on his hands he asks one after the other o' these young women to come up an' nurse Liz. He says as how a little charity an' gentleness at this time mebbe reclaims Liz from a life o' shame. Finally he gets one out o' the lot who 'lows mebbe she'll take a chance; but she ain't on the job more'n an hour when Liz calls the parson in.

"Reverend," she says, "if you don't fire this here volunteer nurse I'm a-goin' to leave. I'm what I am, an' I know it; but it shore does gravel me to be told about it."

So Philip, he thanks the lady kindly an' says he's much obliged, but perhaps he's asked her to do somethin' he oughtn't to; an' he guesses he'll manage somehow. He don't have to give her more'n half an' openin' before she's gone.

Women don't take to Buckskin Liz worth a whoop, an' Philip he has to fall back on Crabapple Thompson, which the sot ain't half bad, accordin' to Liz. She says he understands her; an' first thing her an' Crabapple gets to arguin' religion, an' Liz, she warns the Crabapple if he ever gets drunk round the parson, an' she gets well an' finds it out, she'll shore make him hard to catch.

No, Philip's too busy to go feedin' round to a new house every night, an' he ain't the kind of a man to go peddlin' out small talk an' compliments to a lot o' women just because they stand ready to fall in love with him. Philip, he's a regular man, an' there ain't no female in Panamint that grades high enough for him; an' there ain't no bunch o' females that's goin' to make a mollycoddle outer him, either.

"Chuckwalla," he says—he comes to me for comfort when he can't stand it no longer—"it's an awful strain on a parson to be rubbin' up agin folks that wears their best side outside when they meet up with the minister. Me, I like my souls turned inside out—an' mostly I like 'em when they're naked an' I can see all the sin."

Well, son, this Buckskin Liz ee-pisode creates some little talk an' a diversity of opinion. It sorter jolts all hands in the congregation, an' some of the good people makes so bold as to remonstrate with Philip. In particular the chief elder, Absalom Randall, he talks to Philip like a son, an' says he must be careful an' not cause no talk.

"Absalom Randall," says Philip, "let me an' you have a show-down right here an' now. I'm a plain minister o' the Gospel an' not a divinity. I object seriously to this idea of a congregation electin' to think their pastor's so blamed pure he mustn't let himself go near sin an' sordidness in male or female. I'm a-tryin' to do

this job accordin' to my Master's example. Elder, did you ever hear of a woman named Mary Magdalene?"

"Yes, yes!" says this hoary-headed old hypocrite. "I understand, parson; but you're young and I'm only warnin' you about people that may not understand."

"Your wife an' daughter, I take it, is included in that category," says Philip. "I recall I asked both of 'em to step up to the parsonage an' help me manage Buckskin Liz; but they don't oblige me."

"That's work for a trained nuss, my dear Mr. Pharo," says ol' Silvertip—I allers call him that, because he's a heap like a b'ar in many ways; an', havin' pulled himself out of a mean hole which Philip plunges him into, he takes up his hat an' goes back to the bank.

That night me an' Philip is settin' on the front porch o' the parsonage and he tells me about it. I don't say nothin'; but when Silvertip comes prancin' down to the bank next mornin' I'm settin' in at his desk—an' Silvertip's fired!

"Silvertip," I says, "hereafter you'll leave the Reverend Mr. Pharo to run his game without interference. Now you trot along to the cashier an' he'll give you back the five thousand you invested, at bankin' interest to date; an' don't you come in here no more. If you do I'll skelp you!"

What does this old Silvertip do? Son, I'm ashamed to tell you. He runs blubberin' to Philip an' begs him to use his influence with me to get him back his job; an' o' course, when Philip comes over an' tells me I don't know how to run a bank an' to get away from that desk an' let Silvertip do his work, I ain't got no option but to oblige him. Anyway, I've put Silvertip in his place, an' I'm figgerin' he'll leave Philip alone hereafter.

Now there's lately come to town a person callin'

himself Bud Deming. I know Bud well. He's a gambler, but he's tee-totally on the square; so when he applies for a license to open up a combination gamblin' hall, dance-hall, saloon an' restauraw, nachelly he gets it. I'm for encouragin' legitimate commercial enterprises every time, an' the only mistake I make in Bud Deming's case is in failin' to look over the plans o' Bud's deadfall. I'll explain later.

Well, when Bud's place o' business is ready he plans to give a banquet to the leadin' citizens an' the future patrons o' his house as a sort o' grand openin'. Me bein' the mayor an' the daddy o' the camp, nachelly he invites me, an' still further honors me by insistin' that I'm to be the toastmaster. I'm agreeable; then me an' Bud arranges the program o' speakers an' toasts, an' Bud has a bright idee. •

"How'd it do," he says, "to invite the parson? Think he'd come?"

"Try him an' see, Bud," I says. "All I know is you won't offend him by askin'."

So Hank Bartlett gets out the printed invitations an' the programs over on the Nugget Press, an' Bud mails one to Philip. Right off Philip writes Bud a letter, acceptin' with thanks, an' says he'll shore be there when the dinner bell rings. A invite like that might have riled some parsons; but Bud's meanin' well, an' Philip knows he is, an' he's never missin' any opportunities for gettin' acquainted with Bud's kind o' people. So he accepts just like you or me.

Son, that banquet shore was a hummer! I make Bud the address o' welcome an' interduce the speakers. Philip says grace before an' after meals an' responds to the toast: Panamint; Her Dull Past an' Brilliant Future. An' if he don't make a hit I'm a Chinaman! Sunflower Sadie, which Sadie's Bud's light-o'-love, as

the feller says, declares he's a wonder; an' after the banquet she comes up an' shakes hands with him an' tells him so.

Is Philip embarrassed when Sunflower Sadie shakes his flipper? Not a bit. Does he give her a ree-ligious talk an' tell her to abandon the sinful life she's leadin'? No, sir! This parson of ours is a gentleman an' don't get familiar on brief acquaintance. A-lookin' back on them days now I think I figger out Philip's system, which was to be so good an' kind an' gentle an' human an' natural an' noble that everybody's just got to love him; an' then he has things all his own way, an' you're ready to bust a laig runnin' to church to holler "Halleluia!" Me, I love that boy like he's my own son, for he grades high. He's the biggest man that ever come to Panamint. Somehow he manages to pull all the burs off'n religion an' make it as smooth as long sweetenin'.

Hank Bartlett runs an account o' the banquet in the Nugget, an' I'm down at the post office when old Silvertip gets his paper an' reads about the banquet. He just goes staggerin' back to the bank, lookin' like he's goin' to have some sort of a fit. I'm looking for breakers, as the feller says, an' I ain't disapp'inted. Pretty soon the druggist comes pussy-footin' it into the bank an' him an' Silvertip goes into executive session. As he's leavin' I'm lingerin' by the door an' I hear him say:

"It's an outrage! I'm goin' to see the other elders an' call a meetin', Randall, if you don't."

I steps out an' takes the druggist by the arm.

"Neighbor," I says, "if you call that meetin' this here bank'll call your note. We got a majority o' you elders represented in our Bills Receivable account, an' I guess, as the feller says, Chuckwalla Bill Redfield's got the situation well in hand."

They didn't call no meetin'.

However, a-gettin' back to this here Bud Deming: He's caterin' to the select trade o' the camp, an' if there's one thing he prides himself on it's the grub in his restauraw. He don't spare no expense; an', as Philip sees right off the night o' the banquet Bud's fodder is the real quill, the follerin' evenin' he drops into the restauraw for his supper.

As a cook, Crabapple Thompson don't grade higher'n flapjacks an' *frijoles*; an' it's plain wearin' on Philip to dine out with the members o' his flock, who treat him like he's a superior person. Bud has some good soup an' a light dessert that's something to admire; an' when he's finished his grub Philip calls the waiter an' 'lows he'll buy some for his patients up at the parsonage if the cook'll load up a basket for him to carry it in; which the cook done the same an' Philip's goin' out with the basket—when Bud spots him.

Now, after ascertainin' what he's got in the basket, Bud Deming, which he has a heart as big as all outdoors, says to Philip:

"Parson, I ain't no church-goin' man, but when it comes to feedin' the hungry an' slippin' a dollar to a down-an'-outer, that's my religion. As a business man I'm willin' to let you pay for your own scoffin's, but this grub you're totin' home for them sick fellers you got on your hands, that's on the house; an' it'll continue to be on the house—three times a day, twenty-one times a week—while I'm runnin' this restauraw. You come yourself or send Crabapple, an' the cook'll have instructions to have it ready an' waitin' for you."

"Bud," says the parson, "you're a no-good ol' skunk, but you're shore a-layin' up treasures in heaven for yourself!" An' then him an' Bud laughs an' has their little joke an' walks arm an' arm together to the door.

Speakin' o' this door, it's the sole entrance to Bud's

hall o' sin. As you come in there's the long bar on the left; in the center there's a space for dancin', an' the gamblin' layouts is along the right wall; while in the rear there's a glass door leadin' into the restauraw.

This glass door is the only way in, an' likewise it's the only way out; in consequence of which, when Philip takes to patronizin' Bud's restauraw he has to pass through the departments out in front.

Philip ain't been feedin' at the restauraw three weeks before he's on speakin' terms with every barkeeper, gambler, swamper an' dance-hall girl in the place. He don't stop to talk with them at all when he comes in, but as he walks through he has a nod an' a smile for all hands. It's "Howdy, Bill, you ol' pelican!" or "Good evenin', Tessie!" an' he's back in the restauraw. Same thing when he comes out.

An' to show you the effect o' this simple treatment on them denizens o' Bud's place, every man an' woman, from time to time, takes occasion to apologize to Philip for the architect that draws Bud's plans! Why, that parson has more friends among them people than me—an' I have money to give away. What's more, I'm a-givin' it too!

Well, as I say, things goes along this way mebbe a month, when Chappie Ellerton comes to town. Speakin' o' Chappie reminds me o' that sayin' from the Scriptures: "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one o' these."

In face an' figger Chappie's a heap like Philip. Hank Bartlett allers 'lows as how he's a poet gone wrong. He's allers lookin' like he'd stepped out of a ban'box; an' I suppose if somebody'd killed him the night him an' Philip meet up, he'd dress mebbe two thousand dollars on the hoof in jewelry an' glad raiment.

Son, if Solomon ever put on half the dog Chappie Ellerton does the ol' gentleman sure was a sport! Chappie's shore a lily o' the field in p'int o' looks an' labor; but when it comes to spinnin', right there him an' the lily forks trails. Chappie's a spinner from 'way back, him controllin' the destinies of a little ivory ball in a circle o' numbers an' colors, the same bein' known to science as a roulette wheel.

It's Chappie's first night on shift in Bud Deming's place, along in the shank o' the evenin', when there ain't nothin' much doin'. He's standin' back o' the wheel waitin' for the play to start; an' him an' the night both bein' young, he's singin' a little song of his own devisin':

"Roun' she goes an' roun' she goes;
An' where she stops nobody knows
But the Lord!—an' He won't tell!"

Philip's just comin' out o' the restauraw an' is stoppin' a brief second at the end o' the bar to thank Bud for his daily contribution to the sick an' destitoot; so nachelly he hears Chappie croonin' his little ditty over an' over again! There ain't a soul at the wheel but Chappie, but he's spinnin' the ball just the same—for practice, I guess; an' singin' because he knows from experience that advertisin' pays.

Well, son, the preacher, hearin' the song, turns around for a look at the blasphemer; Chappie, who's sensitive to a degree, feels somebody sizin' him up; so he glances round an' spots the preacher. Then them two looks at each other.

Now, the Reverend Pharo's a new one on Chappie. He don't figger none on meetin' a preacher in a gamblin' hall; consequently the sight completely busts Chappie's ideals wide open, an' he grins at the parson.

On his part the parson 'lows as how Chappie's a new one on him. He's such a kid to be herdin' a roulette wheel, an' his smile's plumb irresistible; so the preacher smiles back an' crosses over to him. It's the first time on record he ever lingers in the gamblin' hall.

"Friend," he says, "ain't it possible for you to ply your vocation without draggin' the name o' the Lord into it? I should jedge, from a casual inspection o' your head, that you got imagination enough to invent some other madrigal not contrary to the Second Commandment."

"If I'd known there was a preacher driftin' round loose in this here haunt o' the particular an' the unparticular, the quick an' the quicker, the secular an' the insectivorous, I'd 'a' done it without askin'," says Chappie. He spins the ball again an' sings:

"Roun' she goes an' roun' she goes;
An' where she stops nobody knows.
An' nobody gives a turiloo, turille-addy!"

"Now that's just as good," says the sky pilot, laughin'.

"Try your luck!" says Chappie. He's a mite fresh, is Chappie, an' inclined to have a little fun with any preacher he ketches in a gamblin' house.

"My jovial friend," says Philip, "I never gamble. I've never been this close to a roulette wheel before."

"This ain't gamblin'," says Chappie; "it's just a mortal cinch in favor o' the house. D'ye suppose Bud'd be reskin' his bank roll if it wasn't? The odds is thirty-eight to thirty-five agin you."

"Then why should I try my luck?" says Philip.

"To be a good feller," says Chappie. "You bein' a parson an' hornin' into my game thataway, I got a notion you've jinxed the wheel; an' presently some

mucker comes along an' busts the bank. You ought to lug that jinx away with you when you leave."

"How?"

"By pikin' a dollar to take away the curse."

"You young rascal!" says Philip laughin'. "You're darin' me to gamble just because I'm a preacher, an' I got a good notion to take you up. Remember what the Scriptures say: 'Them that lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.'"

"Meanin' what, dominie?"

"Meanin', in your own classical language, that I might bust the bank."

"No danger," says Chappie. "I'm game. Come on, parson! Be a sport!"

"All right," says Philip, "I'll gamble with you—on one condition."

"It's accepted. What does she look like?"

"Since a preacher in a gamblin' house playin' a roulette wheel for money is an unusual sight," says Philip, "a gambler in church ought to prove an equally interestin' attraction. It ain't fair for me to furnish the whole show; so if I play your game you'll have to play mine. That's fair, ain't it?"

"I should tell a man!" says Chappie, laughin' to see the trap Philip's sprung on him. "Parson, you've shore got me in the nine-hole that time."

"That bein' thoroughly understood I'll expect to see you in church next Sunday. I shall now tempt the tongue o' scandal," says Philip. "Also, by reason o' you remarkin' that I got you in the nine-hole, whatever that may be, I shall take you at your word an' play the nine." An' he lays his dollar on the Curse o' Scotland.

"Yes," says Chappie, "I've seen fellers play them hunches before." An' he spins the ball an' sings, plumb forgetful o' present company:

"Roun' she goes an' roun' she goes;
An' where she stops nobody knows
But the Lord!—an' He won't tell!"

"There you go again, bustin' the Second Commandment!" says Philip—an' the ball drops into the pocket.

"Nine, red, odd, low, third column, an' first twelve," says Chappie in his professional tones. "How'll you have it, parson?"

Now the fact o' the matter is, Philip don't have no more idee o' roulette than that Champagne Charley jackass o' mine has of astronomy. He don't even know he's won an' that Chappie's askin' him whether he'll take chips or silver, for he ain't thinkin' of gamblin' at all; but what a shame it is that a nice-appearin' young feller like this ain't doin' some good in life.

So Chappie, figgerin' the parson won't bet any more an' hence won't need chips, shoves over a stack o' thirty-five dollars. It's only then that Philip sees he's won, an' the shock of it scares him stiff. He don't figger that anything like this is goin' to happen; an', what's more, he don't want it to happen, because he only intends to play a dollar an' quit after he's got the strangle hold on Chappie an' rounded him up for the church! He stands there kinder stupid, thinkin' it over.

"Oh," says Chappie, "I guess I got you sized up all wrong after all. Goin' to let her ride, eh? Well, you are a sporty parson, ain't you? However, I'm sorry to say the house won't let you pyramid your bets." An' he points over his shoulder with his thumb to the sign on the wall above him: Ten-Dollar Limit!

Then he reaches over, pinches the parson's stack down to ten dollars an' spins the ball again.

"Roun' she goes an' roun' she goes;
An' where she stops nobody knows
But the Lord!—an' He won't tell!"

"Didn't I warn you agin that third line?" says Philip, an' the ball drops home.

"Nine! The Curse o' Scotland repeats," says Chappie, reachin' casual for the tray containin' the gold an' currency; an' then Philip wakes up to what's happenin'.

Nevertheless, he don't like it one little bit, for he ain't a gambler an' winnin' don't excite him like it does most people. He's just a human preacher sparrin' with Satan for a soul, an' the thought o' winnin' a lot of unclean money is plain repugnant to him. Not for all the wealth o' Panamint will he touch a cent o' the wages o' sin. Still, he's a human bein'—an' as curious as a pet coon. He's just nachelly got to see how rich he is if he ain't got a conscience; so he starts countin' the money without drawin' down his ten-dollar bet, which is still ridin'.

Chappie, not bein' familiar with sportin' parsons, gives Philip a look of admiration an' sorrer combined; an', takin' it for granted the parson's game for another little whirl on the nine, he spins his ball an' sings his little song again. She repeats! Chappie shoves three hundred an' fifty dollars across to Philip.

"Parson," he says, "you're a lucky man; but as there's only luck in odd numbers, as a rule, an' you've won three times hand runnin' on the nine, your luck's due to change. It's time to shift your bet. Durned if I don't believe you've jinxed my wheel so bad you could win on the hoodoo number!"

"What's that?"

"Thirteen."

Philip looks at Chappie, an' he's tempted. He's only foolin', but he sees that Chappie is dead serious. Consequently, because it's only innercent pastime to Philip, like a boy playin' marbles, he shoves his bet over on to

the thirteen. You see his play, don't you, son? He wants to lose it on the hoodoo number an' retire gracefully when his winnin's is all back in Chappie's tray.

The ball drops into the thirteen pocket! Chappie gets out his white handkerchief an' wipes his corrugated brow, as the feller says, meantime eyein' the parson suspicious-like. On his part, Philip, enjoyin' the knowledge that he's got Chappie fannin' the air, grins back at him—an' Bud Deming, seein' the dinero in front o' the reverend, strolls over to poke some fun at the foreman o' his roulette wheel.

"Hello, Chappie!" he says. "The parson got you goin' south?"

"No," says Chappie; "but, all the same, he's luckier'n a fool. If I hadn't held him to the limit first off I'd be raidin' one o' the other games for more cash right now."

"What?" says Bud, aimin' to be agreeable an' pleasant. "Is the ten-dollar limit annoyin' our clerical friend?"

"He wants to pyramid his bets, startin' right in," complains Chappie. "Plays a dollar on the nine, ketches it, an' lets her ride. I had to pinch him down."

"That so?" says Bud. "Well, the roof is off! Anything the parson wants in this house goes while I'm the proprietor."

"Spread my bets for me, Bud," says Philip. Gawd bless him, he's a lamb!

"He'll win wherever you spread 'em," Chappie warns Bud.

"We'll see," says Bud.

An' he places a hundred on the double-O, a hundred on the green an' a hundred on the even; whereupon Chappie spins the ball an' she drops into the green double-O, winnin' all three bets. The green an' the

even pays double, an' the double-O pays thirty-five to one.

"That's what you get for interferin', boss," says Chappie carelesslike.

He reaches into the dinero an' shoves hundred-dollar bills acrost to the parson until the place begins to look like a patch of alfalfa. An' still the bets goes ridin' as they lay.

Again Chappie spins the ball; again from force o' habit he sings:

"Roun' she goes an' roun' she goes;
An' where she stops nobody knows—"

An' then he waits, holdin' the tune while the ball circles slower an' slower. In a second she's due to run off the right o' way an' go slippin' an' bumpin' among the pegs an' pockets before settlin'.

"Finish your little song, ol'-timer," says the parson.

The ball commences to bump, with the double-O so clost to hand it's even money the ball drops into it, when Chappie sings the last line:

"An' nobody gives a turiloo, turilee-addy!"

The ball drops into the double-O, hesitates—an' pops out into the next pocket, when, accordin' to all the laws o' averages she should have stayed in the double-O! Chappie gives a sort o' suckin' sob an' rakes in the three hundred dollars.

Now all this is just the most wonderful luck in the world, an' Chappie an' Bud ain't never seen or heard o' nothin' like it; but the parson, being free from superstition an' previous experience, don't see nothing so very wonderful in it, because he knows the Lord ain't on the side o' no gambler, an' if he stays with the game

long enough he's bound to lose all he's got. However, he's smart enough to see he's built a fire under Chappie; so he says:

"Now that's a heap better, Chappie. Don't that last turn prove to you there ain't no luck in usin' the name o' the Lord in vain?"

"It shore does look that way," says Chappie; "but I happen to know the Lord ain't got nothin' to do with it. There ain't nothing on earth can control that little ball 'ceptin' the law of averages, an' your luck's been runnin' beyond the wildest dreams o' average."

Havin' won a bet at last Chappie's feelin' cheerful again.

Now the parson knows he ain't goin' to take the money, even if he wins it; so consequently he figgers this is all innercent fun an' no harm to nobody. He sees Chappie an' Bud are takin' him dead serious, an' he's so almighty human he can't help having a little fun with them by a-testin' o' their nerves. Besides, he's plumb anxious to get rid o' the wealth he's accumulated an' remove himself from the occasions o' sin. He figgers he's been lingerin' there too long already, as it is; an', since his luck's had one setback, he 'lows as how the tide has turned, an' if he crowds his hand he'll go bust in five minutes.

"My friends," he says, "I'm only a parson, I know, an' gamblin' ain't my long suit; but, nevertheless, when I'm out for a little mild mental relaxation I likes to bet 'em as high as a hound's back, an' this suspense is aggervatin' to me. I'll bet every dollar before me on number thirteen an' let the tail go with the hide; an' if you're a dead game sport, Bud, you won't take a dare like that from a preacher.

"Boss," says Chappie, "you goin' to let this sportin' parson back you down?"

Now Bud, he knows just as well as Chappie that it ain't in nature to beat a roulette wheel if a man stays with it. Also, the parson's playin' the hoodoo number an' the chances is thirty-five to one against him, not countin' the hoodoo; an' as Bud's as superstitious as any gambler, an' as game as the best, he takes the parson up.

"I'll go you parson," he says; "only I warn you in advance if you win you got upward o' one hundred an' fifty thousand dollars comin' to you, an' I ain't got that much money."

"Bet the house, lock, stock an' barrel," says the parson, "an' we'll call it square at that!"

"Fair enough," says Bud. "Spin the ball, Chappie, an' be right sure you don't take the name o' the Lord in vain. I ain't lookin' to bust the hoodoo on that number."

Now for the first time the Reverend Philip Pharo gets wise to the fact that Chappie an' Bud's as superstitious as two Chinamen, an' this knowledge amuses him a heap.

Consequently, for purposes o' plain human enjoyment, he thinks he'll enter into the sperrit o' the evenin' an' make out as how he's somethin' of a conjurer with a roulette wheel.

"'Twon't do you no good whatever, Bud," he says. "I'm goin' to jinx the wheel." An' he runs his finger clear round it an' chants a line, which he tells me afterward he swipes from a play: "'Roun' her form I draw the awful circle of our solemn church!"

Then he spills somethin' in a furrin language—it's Greek, which Philip's learned in college; but Chappie an' Bud don't know it, an' both are some apprehensive as Chappie spins the ball an' sings his song.

Son, there ain't nothing like that parson's luck ever

seen. The ball pops straight into the thirteen pocket first thing—an' stays there! The Reverend Philip Pharo's busted the bank! Bud Deming's a pauper, an' Chappie Ellerton's workin' for the preacher, who's the sole proprietor of a gamblin' hall!

Chappie Ellerton's as white as a miller an' Bud Deming's face is as yaller as an old cheese. But he's game, is Bud—none more so. He just steps back an' bows to the parson with all respect.

"Parson," he says, "the shack is yours. All hands was paid off at six o'clock tonight an' the title's clear. I don't suppose there's nothin' for me to do round here 'cept to state that it shore was poor judgment on my part havin' only one entrance to my place o' business."

Well, son, Philip just stands there, with his mouth wide open like a kid seein' things at night. Chappie Ellerton is absolutely overcome an' stands starin' at Philip, with *his* mouth open; an' Bud's the only cool man at the table, for he's been busted many a time an' oft, as the poet says, an' the prospect don't worry him none, providin' he can find a job right away. It occurs to Bud that the quickest way to do this is to ask Philip for it—which he done an' that brings the Reverend Philip Pharo out of his trance.

"Why, Bud, you blessed ol' sinner," he says, "what-all d'ye suppose I am?"

"You might be just smeared with luck from heels to hair, but I doubt it," says Bud. "However, that ain't neither here nor there. This here place is a payin' property; an', since it ain't the kind of a place that can be run by a preacher or ex-preacher, it stands to reason you got to have a manager for it. Though I ain't fixin' to throw bouquets at myself, I been runnin' this house with tolerable success up till now, an' I'll leave it to Chuckwalla here if I ain't square."

I've just dropped in an' I'm not conversant with the lay o' the land; so I don't ask no questions, but proceed to give Bud a reputation.

Now Philip wants to assure Bud he don't want the place nohow an' wouldn't tech it for a million dollars, because the whole thing starts with a little innercent joke between him an' Chappie Ellerton; but, knowin' the kind of a gambler Bud is, the boy figgers he'll mebbe hurt his feelin's by pressin' his property back on to him in the presence o' third parties.

While he's figgerin' a graceful way out Chappie Ellerton still further complicates matters by quotin' a little Scripture:

"'Them that lives by the sword shall perish by the sword.' An' truer words than them was never spoke. Bud, this here sportin' parson warns me startin' out exactly how this fiesta's goin' to end! The age o' miracles ain't past yet, an' I don't have to have the parson's church fall on me before I take the hint. Me, I'm through gamblin' forever! Parson, be a good feller an' give me a job slingin' hash in the restauraw till I can get a road stake together." An' that's the first intimation Panamint ever has that Chappie's jewelry ain't what it's cracked up to be.

Now, son, mark the fix that remark puts Philip in—from Philip's p'int o' view. Startin' out, he's made up his mind there's somethin' awful good in Chappie Ellerton an' he's goin' to bring it out. Bein' a parson, nobody knows better'n Philip that the Almighty moves in devious ways His wonders to perform; an' here He is proclaimin' in plain English that this brand, Chappie Ellerton, is ready to be hauled out o' the fire! To Chappie the fact that Philip busts the bank ain't nothin' unusual, but the way the play comes up it is! He's regardin' it as a good, broad hint from the Almighty to

quit gambling'—an' he's quit. Mebbe he's superstitious. Well, all right, but if his superstition makes a good man out o' him, then Philip's ready to praise Gawd for installin' the superstition into this gambler. He's got Chappie fannin' for fair, an' it occurs to him if he catches Chappie on the rebound, as the feller says, he's got him.

On the other hand, if he lets on that his winnin' Bud's gamblin' house is just plain luck, an' he ain't invoked the aid o' the Lord nohow, he disillusiones Chappie; an' mebbe the young feller goes to gamblin' again. Also, this newly acquired property o' his is the haunt o' sinners o' both sexes; an', with him bein' boss as well as pastor, he gets closer than ever to them. An' he's smart enough to know you got to get awful close to a sinner to get his confidence in anything ree-ligious.

It does appear to Philip that he ain't got nothin' to gain by declinin' his winnin's, an' he's got a whole lot to lose. On the other hand, since he never means to possess this deadfall, Bud ain't got nothin' to lose—only he don't know it! Then, again, Philip's tempted to think the Lord has delivered Bud Deming's place into his hands in order that he may close it up! However, Philip's broad-minded. He don't aim to cram his reeligion down nobody's throat agin their will. So right off he resolves to play a waitin' game.

"All right, Bud," he says; "you're my manager, an' you name your own salary. Chappie, Bud'll fix you up with that job in the restauraw. An' now, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll just mosey along back to the parsonage. This grub I've got in this basket'll be gettin' cold; an', moreover, I greatly fear Crabapple Thompson has a bottle hid out, an' if I ain't there to steady the ol' rascal he'll get drunk on my hands. Thank you for a pleasant five minutes' entertainment."

An', smilin' cordial to all hands, the Reverend Philip Pharo dusts out o' that gambling house like the devil's at his tail a-wallopin' him at every jump.

I get the story o' what's happened from Bud an' Chappie; an', on account o' being able to guess Philip's attitood toward gamblin' an' knowin' him better'n them, I see it ain't goin' to do the parson no good to have the news leak out. Also, I know Philip just nachelly don't intend to consider himself the owner o' Bud's place, for I can see by the light in his eye he's bustin' with laughter 'way back inside; so I warns Bud an' Chappie to go slow an' not spread the news yet awhile. An' as both gents is smart enough to see they're going to be deviled out o' camp on account o' workin' for a preacher, they're right glad to keep their business to themselves.

Somethin' tells me Philip wants to see me and talk things over, for whenever he's in doubt or trouble the boy allers comes a-runnin' to his ol' Bill-pardner; so I takes a little *pasear* up to the parsonage. I find Philip on his knees in his front room, prayin' Gawd to forgive him. Also, he don't neglect to thank the Lord for plantin' the seed o' redemption in Chappie Ellerton's heart, an' prays that Chappie'll be given the strength to hold to his high resolve; an', as a grand wind-up, he asks the Almighty to direct him in the predicament he's in. I can hear him prayin' out loud as I come in.

"Well, Philip," I says, "pendin' a tip from On High, take a little advice from Chuckwalla Bill. You stay away from that gamblin' hall hereafter, unless you're aimin' to cause fits among your flock."

"I got justification for my course right here," he says, an' lays his hand on his Bible.

"I know it," I says—which I don't; but I'm willin' to take that boy's word for anything. "But you stay

away, an' have your grub sent up by Crabapple Thompson hereafter. Meantime we'll let Chappie an' Bud suffer under your little joke until you've had a chance to get Chappie into church oncet. Then I'll quietly slip the word to Bud just how you regard this here transaction, an' I'll make him understand it's all right."

"Will you do that, Chuckwalla?" he says, greatly relieved; an' I promised.

Well, Crabapple Thompson's drunk that night, an' he stays loaded three days; which nachelly throws such a burden o' work on Philip he's kept right close to the parsonage. Come Sunday mornin' an' time to hold service, his consumptive gambler is that far gone the parson figgers he dassent leave him alone, so he ambles down Amethyst Avenoo to Jake Russell's shanty.

He's aimin' to ask Jake's wife to step up to the parsonage an' play nurse while he's holdin' services; but Jake Russell's wife she meets him with such a dignified front compared to former receptions that he ain't got the heart to state his errand, an' merely says he hopes she'll be on hand to lead in the singin'—which this same female has a voice like a desert canary—an' moseys along to Tom Cahill's cabin. Tom's wife don't attend Philip's church, an' not havin' one of her own in Panamint, her Sundays is free to her; so Philip figgers she'll oblige him, which she does, an' he goes down to the church an' mounts the pulpit.

I'm in church that mornin' myself; for I been hearin' some gossip, an' I'm there out o' curiosity to see what's goin' on. The first thing Philip notices when he turns round to preach his sermon is what I've noticed—an' that is that the male attendance this mornin' has increased fifty percent, an' the percentage o' women has dwindled no little.

The next thing he notices is that Chappie Ellerton is

settin' up in the front row, but he don't notice somethin' else, which I do—and that's Bud Deming an' Sunflower Sadie a-settin' away over in a dark corner an' lookin' an' feelin' outer place.

Well, son, the parson chooses for his text that mornin' the story about the shepherd that loses a sheep, which he leaves the rest o' the flock an' goes back lookin' for the lost sheep till he finds him; an' how there was more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than ninety-nine just men that need no repentance.

He ain't noways pertinent an' particular in his remarks; but, all the same, Chappie knows the parson means him, an' he's plumb interested right off. Philip gradually works away from the text an' pretty soon he's off on his fav'rite rampage, a-pleadin' for a broader viewp'int in ree-ligion an' more charity an' humanity toward sinners; then he sees Chappie's eyes just a-poppin' with interest, an' he gets worked up an' plumb inspired, an' tears loose regardless. If I'm a ree-ligious man at the time—which I ain't never been an' never will—it's even money he brings tears to my eyes with that sermon.

It shore did lay over anythin' you ever heard tell of, though a-lookin' back at it now it ain't so much what he says as the way he says it. He's that sincere I'm for givin' three cheers, and I guess I'd 'a' done it if Philip don't stop about then an' kneel down for the closin' prayer.

After the congregation files out, Chappie Ellerton's settin' where he is, an', of course, everybody's next to who Philip's been alludin' in his prayer. A lot of us is hangin' round outside, an' when Philip an' Chappie comes out together I jine them, an' we all three walk up Amethyst Avenoo together to the hotel. I'm for

backin' the parson's play an' gettin' him an' Chappie well acquainted; so I've invited 'em both up to the hotel to take Sunday dinner with me.

Does Philip talk ree-ligion to Chappie at that feed? No, sir. Philip's smart enough to know any man on earth can get enough of a good thing, an' he just nachelly proceeds to forget he's a preacher an' act natural an' talk natural. As I recall it now Philip was tellin' us about the boy that run the first Marathon race 'way back in B.C., when a barkeep from Bud Deming's place comes runnin' into the dinin'-room.

"Reverend," he says to Philip, "a drunken Greaser's knifed Bud Deming an' Bud's askin' to see you before he kicks the bucket."

Well, son, when me an' Philip an' Chappie gets down there, pore ol' Bud's lyin' on a billiard table, with Sunflower Sadie holdin' his hand an' takin' on pretty hard. There's mebbe twenty men standin' round the table, waitin' for Bud to pass out. But, he smiles when Philip bends over him.

"Parson," he says, a-reachin' out for Philip's hand, "a drunken Greaser has knifed me for fair, but I want to tell you he never got drunk in your place. No, sir. Ever since I been your manager I been runnin' this place respectable; an' when this drunk comes in an' wants a drink I'm sorry, but he can't have no more. I'm for sendin' him on his way peaceable, but he won't go; an' in the mix-up he slips a dirk into me."

Philip, he paws Bud over an' sees he's cut pretty bad; so he ups and tells Bud he'd better get his house in order.

"House!" says Bud, who don't get what Philip's drivin' at. "Why, what are you talkin' about, parson? It ain't my house. You won it fair, though I ain't said nothin' to nobody about it till now." He raises himself

up on his elbow. "Boys," he says, "listen to me; I'm dyin', an' I'm tellin' the truth. This house an' everything in it, includin' the bank roll, belongs to the best sky-pilot ever. Last Wednesday night the parson here busts the bank at roulette, an' I staked the business agin the cash, an' lost. I been his manager ever since, an' the book'll show it. Chappie here will bear me out. Now all you fellers, 'cept Chuckwalla an' Chappie an' the help, run along an' leave me alone with my boss, because him an' me has the details o' the business to settle up."

When they're all gone Bud says to Philip:

"Parson, I'm goin' to ask you, for ol' sake's sake, to look after Sadie. She's a good girl, parson. If there's anything wrong with Sadie I'm the responsible party. She's just loved me enough to leave a respectable home an' lose her reputation; an', parson, when I'm gone, for Gawd's sake help her to start in all over again. Sadie, ol' girl, the boss'll look after you when I'm gone; an' you be guided by him, because he'll be the one best, true friend you ever had.

"An' say, boss, you don't want no deadfall like this. No! No! It ain't becomin' to you. Only last night"—Bud is pretty far gone by this time an' talkin' hard—"a feller died o' minin'-camp pneumonia—settin' right up in that chair. An', comin' home from church, me an' Sadie—we got talkin' it over—an' Sadie suggests a plan—parson, we was goin' to—to go up to—the parsonage an' talk—it over with you—this place bein' devoted—to helpin' folks—instead o' ruinin' 'em—a hospital, you know, parson. An' the restauraw mebbe supports—the hospital; an' you got—a forty-thousand dollar bank roll to start. Chappie said he was goin' to church, an' me an' Sadie—we went too. Me an' Sadie an' Chappie—we're them lost sheep—you

was talkin' about—ain't we? Parson, pray for me! I'm goin'—tell the boys not—to—lynch—the Greaser. He ain't responsible. No, parson; it's fellers like me—that kills—people—with whisky—"

"Bud," says our parson, "I give you the word of Almighty Gawd there's going to be more rejoicin' among the angels in heaven when you get there than over the arrival o' ten thousand preachers."

An' then him an' Sunflower Sadie an' Chappie get down on their knees by the billiard table an' pray for Bud Deming's soul. Me, I ain't ree-ligious. I ain't never learned to pray, so I can't j'in in.

In about five minutes ol' Bud's over the river, an' I take charge, while Philip escorts Sunflower Sadie home to the shanty her an' Bud occupied. Sadie's takin' on somethin' awful, an' Philip has her by the arm, tryin' to comfort her; but he can't. An' you want to remember, son, that this is Sunday, in the main street o' Panamint, an' every woman in hearin' distance o' Sunflower Sadie's sobs comes to her door or her winder an' has a look at the procession.

Son, I suppose you've lived long enough in this world to know that the wicked don't amount to nothin'; so nobody worries over 'em. It's only the pure an' the clean that can be reached by scandal. The bigger a man is the more we expect o' him; the heavier he is, the harder he falls. An' it's that way with Philip. This is how the deal figgers out:

The night he's playin' the wheel with Chappie Ellerton, one o' Bud's barkeeps sees him make his killin' an' walk out, leavin' the money behind him. When he asks Bud about it later Bud's some irritated an' fires him for bein' too almighty curious about other people's business. As this barkeep's goin' out he meets Jake Russell comin' in. So nachelly he unloads his grief on

Jake; an', on account o' blamin' the parson for the loss of his job, he tells Jake the parson's been playin' the wheel an' won thousands o' dollars.

Jake, he's plumb surprised, but a little inquiry convinces him the parson *has* been playin' the wheel; so when he goes home that night he tells his wife. Mebbe Jake, bein' human, adds a few trimmin's to suit his fancy, an' his wife jumps to conclusions. She ain't got no more brains than a sage hen nohow; so she runs an' tells her neighbor what the pastor's been up to.

"Like as not," says this female, "he's worth watchin'." Jake says how he calls them awful women down there by their first names!"

Son, before sunset that night there's gossip a-flyin' round Panamint to the effect that the Reverend Mr. Pharo's a terrible gambler; also, that he drinks now an' then, for more'n once he's been seen downtown feelin' pretty jolly; an' mebbe liquor had somethin' to do with it. The next we know he's been drinkin' and' has been seen throwin' gold pieces round like a hardened offender.

On Friday the story's growed, an' the women is smackin' their lips an' wallin' their eyes, an' sayin': "It's such a pity he's that way!" It seems by this time the parson's been leadin' a double life ever since he come into the camp, a-consortin' with the scum o' Panamint by night an' a-preachin' the Gospel by day.

By Saturday it's common knowledge that Philip is the outcast o' his family, an' has only entered the ministry as a sort o' blind, after years o' hell-raisin' an' debauchery, which is most likely why the bishop sends him to Panamint anyhow—to get shet of him. My part in bringin' him is raked over an', as I'm regarded as honest, but desperate on slight provocation, my friendship for Philip don't help him any. With repetition,

son, that story's growed so that when the finished product comes back to Mrs. Jake Russell she fails to recognize her own brain child, but takes it all as fresh evidence agin the parson; an' away she goes, spreadin' the news round the camp. Mrs. Russell is one o' these here Christian women that holds she's got a sacred duty to perform by stirrin' things up an' savin' the church from scandal.

Of course, son, you see what happens? When the parson escorts Sunflower Sadie home to her shack, after Bud cashes in, Mrs. Jake Russell sees him. She knows who Sadie is; but, even if she don't, it ain't no trouble to guess what she is—an' right then an' there the parson's damned! That afternoon the ladies o' Panamint swarms like bees. Mrs. Jake, she's the queen bee; an', as there's a lot o' old he-drones swarmin' with them, it all makes considerable of a buzz.

Of course Philip's that busy preparin' for Bud's funeral he don't get a whisper of it. We don't have no ice in Panamint; an', as it's July an' a hundred an' twelve in the shade, an' no shade, we've got to plant Bud in a hurry, which his funeral's billed for ten o'clock next morning.

The first intimation I get that affairs has reached a climax is when the druggist an' the postmaster an' ol' Silvertip calls on me on the hotel porch to consult about the scandal. They don't get far after I find out what they're after.

"Silvertip," I says, "me an' you've fell out once before on account o' you stickin' your nose into the parson's affairs, an' now we've fallen out forever an' for aye, as the poet says. You come down to the bank Monday mornin' an' I'll settle up with you. As for you other two skunks," I says, "you come, too, an' bring checks for your promissory notes."

"Oh, I guess not," says Silvertip. "Several of us has got together an' bought up a little block o' that bank stock from a friend o' your'n and now you're control-lin' about forty-eight percent of it instead o' fifty-one. Ed Penrose, who allers votes his stock with you, right or wrong, got hard up an' we bought him out."

Well, son, I can see Silvertip's tellin' the truth, or he dasn't have the nerve to come an' talk that way to the daddy o' Panamint; so I wait, a-cussin' Ed Penrose, to see what kind of proposition Silvertip's got to unload. I don't have to wait long.

"You're responsible for this unworthy parson," he says; but I stopped him with a little Scripture I got up my sleeve. I learn it from Philip.

"Jedge not," I says, "lest ye be jedged!"

"Never mind about that," he says. "We're here, out o' deference to you as the leadin' citizen o' this camp, to give you the quiet tip to get shet o' the Reverend Philip Pharo, or the vestry holds a meetin' an' fires him without notice."

Son, I'm all broke up. I know they mean it, an' yet it don't lay in me to take program from them ol' women. I'm seein' red an' reachin' for my weepsons to kill the coyotes, when I happened to recollect I'm the mayor o' Panamint an' standin' for law an' order.

[Old Chuckwalla Bill rolled out of his blankets and stood erect; his voice rose shrilly as he lived once more this outrage of thirty years ago; he trembled with the scourge of it.]

Son [he went on] they have me cornered! Me, I've gave more'n ten thousand dollars toward that church, an' now they're tellin' me I got to slip Philip the word he ain't wanted! I've got to take that boy aside, just when he's up to his ears in the work he loves, an' tell him he ain't makin' good! Me, the daddy o' Panamint!

Me, Chuckwalla Bill Redfield, the first an' last mayor this camp ever has! Son, I'm all choked up. I can't say nothin'—can't even cuss ol' Silvertip. I just set there like a fool an' commence to cry—'cause I ain't never been licked before. The elders stand there gloatin' at me, as I discover the minute I can see clear ag'in; an' then it come over me that I got to set those tarantulas in their place if I go to jail for it for life.

"Gentlemen," I says, "which that word is a mere figger o' speech an' not meant, you-all can quit the Reverend Pharo's church if you feel like it; but me, I'm the biggest subscriber to the funds that built that church an' furnished it, an' I'm goin' to take possession an' maintain the parson in his job if I have to kill every elder in the flock. This here's a free country, an' Philip Pharo stays in the camp while I'm mayor; an' Gawd have mercy on them that hurts his feelin's or a hair o' his head."

"We'll dispute that in the courts, sir," says Silvertip. The ol' lizard ain't bluffed a little bit; but he sees I'm dangerous, an' him an' his gang pulls their freight without further argyment.

Now, Philip, he 'lows as how he's goin' to have services over Bud in the church, an' has asked me to round up a quartet that's appearin' in the Panamint Variety Theater, an' to make sure the organist is there to play the funeral march an' all. I land the quartet all right, but when I go after the salaried organist I find the elders have been there before me an' the organist's on strike. Yes, sir! It appears that ingrate has scruples an' is arrayed agin the parson; so I give him a slappin' for bein' fresh, an' I 'low, by Judas! I'll play that organ myself if it comes down to it.

I been takin' lessons on the pianner up at the hotel, which I like to amuse myself that-a-way when I go

into a dance hall. I don't know one note from the other, but I've took a lot o' finger exercises an' learned how to pump out a fair bass, an' play by ear. Music is a second nature to me, an' if I hear a tune oncet I got it, though, accordin' to Philip, this ain't nothin' remarkable. He says: "There is a chord in every human heart which, if it can be touched, will bring forth sweet music." Still, I've knowed a lot o' people that couldn't sing a lick or play a tune through, though their folks spends a bar'l o' money on teachers for 'em.

However, I ain't put to no such extremity as havin' to play the organ myself. Buckskin Liz is back in town ag'in, favorin' one foot an' lookin' none too robust; but she's the prime pianner tickler o' that country. An' when I approach her with a proposition to play at Bud's funeral she's there a mile—providin' they don't throw her out o' the organ loft.

The funeral leaves Bud's shanty at ten o'clock next mornin'. I'm one o' the pallbearers an' Chappie Ellerton follers the coffin, with Sunflower Sadie on his arm as chief mourner. I've ordered out the Fire Department, but the skunks have struck on me an' won't parade. Most o' Bud's friends is on hand, however; an' all in all, it's a pretty imposin' funeral as we march to the church, which when we get there we find the elders standin' on the front steps an' the door padlocked top an' bottom. Philip's standin' among 'em, lookin' all broke up, an' I see they've been pickin' on the boy.

Well, son, I'm mayor o' Panamint, an' thirty year ago I'm that settled in my convictions I don't abdicate 'em none too easy. I give my handle o' the coffin to one o' Bud's barkeeps an' I walk up the stairs. I'm full o' dignity.

"Gentlemen," I says, "what appears to be the trouble?"

Ol' Silvertip steps for'd.

"Mr. Mayor," he says, "the pastor o' this church havin' disgraced his congregation, himself, an' the house o' Gawd, the vestry has seen fit to remove him from office, an' we don't aim to permit further degradation o' our place o' worship by admittin' this funeral. It's a-makin' a mockery o' ree-ligion," he says.

"All right, Silvertip," I says. "Have it your own way; but I want you to bear in mind the vestry didn't build this church an' equip it. I reckon I ought to be consulted. Open that door—an' be damn quick about it!"

"I got an order from the jestice o' the peace, restrainin' you an' John Doe an' Richard Roe an' William Black an' Thomas Green from usin' this church in any way," says Silvertip. "It's a public buildin', built by public subscription."

"Well," I says, "I'll tend to that jestice o' the peace after the funeral. Meantime let's proceed with these here obsequies." An' I reach under my long-tailed Sunday coat an' produces a pair o' thirty-eights on forty-four frames—the sweetest guns I ever owned. "If there's an elder in sight in one minute," I says, "we're goin' to have another funeral tomorrow mornin'—an' mebbe two or three."

I come up the stairs an' they backed away from me. I seen they didn't have the nerve of a lot o' field-mice; so I shoots the padlocks offen the doors an' throw 'em wide open. Buckskin Liz ducks in an' up into the organ loft first thing; an' when the music starts they lug Bud in an' set him on two chairs up in front near the pulpit. Me, I stand at the door, an' every soul that goes into that church has to state to me whether he's for or agin Philip; an' when they're all inside I got the grandest collection o' thieves, gamblers, bums, rascals, an' low-

down men an' women I ever see together at one time before or since. The only respectable persons in the church, from the standp'int o' the righteous, is me an' Philip. Me, I'm no sweet young thing at that, but I'm regarded as a man, more or less. No sir; I didn't even let them elders in to hear the quartet, which is some deprivation, for they shore sang somethin' beautiful.

I don't suppose I'm ever goin' to forget Philip's oration over Bud Deming. It seems the elders had him to themselves for about half an hour before the funeral come, an' they give him a pretty exact bill o' particulars. Philip seemed to realize mebbe this would be the last sermon he'd preach in Panamint, an' in his openin' remarks he took occasion to refer to the charges agin him. He don't show no bitterness, but quotes from the Scriptures an' says: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!"

Then he says if he can't explain his conduct to their satisfaction, mebbe the Lord can, an' he opens up the Bible an' reads a piece. I learned it by heart afterward. It's from the Gospel o' Saint Matthew, chapter nine, from the tenth to the thirteenth verses:

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

"And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

"But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Son, ain't that logic? Them elders had accused him

o' keepin' company with sinners an' publicans—Bud Deming, he was the publican; an' in particular they're wild because he went an' sat down to a banquet with the scum o' the camp! Christ did that an' got criticized for it; an' Philip makes the mistake o' thinkin' times has changed! He figgers he can foller in his Master's footsteps an' convince his flock he ain't doin' it for evil pleasure an' base profit.

The Lord could have set down with Bud Deming an' his kind without takin' any resks—and so could Philip. He's constitooted so it ain't no trouble or danger for him to walk through sin an' come out clean every time. There's something about that boy that makes anybody respect him an' his cloth; an' while he's around sinners behave. They know the danger he's runnin', because they've been through it ahead of him; an', instead o' draggin' him down to their level, they're for protectin' him.

That day Philip has the kind o' congregation that big, broad human heart o' his is allers cravin'—the kind o' folks that needs him. No, he didn't come to Panamint to call the righteous to repentance, because they're able to care for themselves; but his big heart naturally expands with love for the unfortunates he sees settin' on the seats in front of him at Bud Deming's funeral, an' he talks to 'em like a brother, just a-drawin' a little object lesson from Bud's life—an' death. He don't have one hard word to say agin them doggone elders that's nigh broke his heart, but there ain't a soul in church that don't know he's sufferin'; an' we're all mentally reachin' out to pat him on the shoulder an' say: "Never you mind, Philip! We're for you, an' don't you forget it!"

I reckon that sermon o' Philip's that day nets the heaviest crop o' converts ever harvested with one

preacher. I been a minin'-camp millionaire twice, an' busted both times as sudden as kickin' the ladder out from under a painter—an' I laughed an' called all hands to have a drink. That's all I care for misfortune; but when the world riz up an' busted in two the friend I'd have gone to hell for, I feel almighty bad. I'm full up an' can't join in the singin', an' me—I'm right fond o' music too.

Does Philip ever get back into the church after Bud's funeral? No, sir; he don't. The word's gone out that he owns a gamblin' house an' a dance hall; an' there's no disputin' that, for ain't twenty men heard Bud Deming proclaim it before he dies? Pore Bud! He thinks he's doin' Philip a favor, when every word he says damns the parson deeper'n ever.

An' ain't Philip been seen gamblin'?—which he don't deny it; only they won't take his excuse. They'd have lied out of it themselves; so they figgered Philip was doin' the same thing.

It's a hard hand to beat. Philip's got too much explainin' to do; an', as he tells me privately, he's none too good at explainin' to Pharisees. I'm for buildin' him another church to save trouble an' law-suits, because I know he'll cram it with his newly acquired congregation every Sunday; but he won't stand for that.

"No, Chuckwalla," he says; "that's my church that was built for me, an' I'll have to fight this thing out. The vestry has preferred charges agin me with the bishop; an' until I'm cleared o' them charges it ain't ethics for me to defy my congregation. You'll oblige me, Chuckwalla, by not takin' sides in this controversy."

Him tyin' my hands that way, what could I do? However, my sentiments is so well known that whenever one o' the opposition sees me comin' he takes the other side o' the street. Besides, I'm mayor; an' as

mayor I can't foller the dictates o' my ambition, which is to kill Silvertip as a warnin' to all elders.

Philip writes a long letter to the bishop. Me an' Chappie Ellerton, an' Buckskin Liz an' Sunflower Sadie, an' a lot o' non-churchgoers, sends our sworn affidavits, an' on that Philip rests his case. He 'lows as how he's not defendin' himself—only explainin'; an' cites the Bible as his authority. Also he declines to lower his self-respect by appearin' before the Conference for trial; an' while awaitin' the judgment he's my guest up at the hotel. While's he's under fire I won't permit him to occupy the parsonage.

Well, son, when Philip's trial comes up the elders are on hand an' Philip isn't; an' whatever rannikiboo business they put up on the Conference I dunno. All I know is the Conference finds Philip guilty an' heaves him out o' the church for bein' unworthy.

When Philip gets notice he ain't a preacher no longer it busts him up something awful, but still he don't complain. He lets me read the official kick-out, an' then he takes me by the arm an' me an' him has a long walk up on the malpais, where we sets for about half a day lookin' down on Panamint, an' neither of us sayin' a word. Finally he takes out the bishop's letter an' tears it into little pieces.

"Chuckwalla," he says, "I hope I ain't rebellious, but me an' you met in a fight, an' we been fightin' side by side ever since. This is your fight as much as mine in some ways—an' I ain't goin' to lay down on you. Panamint needs me an' I'm goin' to stay. I got a church o' my own—Bud Deming's gambling hall—an' I got a congregation with a good touch o' the devil in it, which is the only kind o' congregation I want anyhow; so I'm goin' into the soul-savin' business on my own account. I got a restauraw runnin' full blast; an', with

Chappie managin' that, I can be self-supportin' an' have time to do the work I want to do. I'm a born preacher—I can't never be nothin' else; an' this here's my vineyard. I'm goin' down-town an' git to work."

I shook hands with him. His consideration o' my feelin's that-a-way teched me deep. That night he gives the bulk o' Bud Deming's bank roll to Sunflower Sadie, an' the next day she starts home to her folks back East. She vows she's goin' to be a good girl the rest o' her life, an' I hope she kept her word.

Then Philip gives all the other misfortunates a little road stake, cleans out the stock o' liquors an' gamblin' layouts, an' rigs up what he calls the Panamint Mission. Chappie takes charge o' the restauraw, which Buckskin Liz is cashier on week days an' organist in the Mission on Sundays an' evenings.

Crabapple Thompson moves Philip's things out o' the parsonage an' follers to the Mission; an' Silvertip an' his crowd import a new preacher, as slick an' smooth as a mouse-colored mule knee-deep in green feed. He measures up to their ideals an' makes the church just what they wanted—a nice, quiet, family affair. He gives 'em what they want an' everybody is happy.

Well, son, Philip was happy, too, even if he was an outlaw, because he got satisfactory results. Also, he's got somethin' else—from that consumptive gambler he'd cared for until the feller died; an' in about two years I see he's failin'. I get the best doctors an' send him away for three months; but he ain't happy an' comes back. He says he's better off in the desert an' a high altitude, an' I guess he is; but, at that, the disease has him for fair an' in the long run it gets him. He's holdin' my hand when he goes.

I ain't mayor no more, for the church party has busted me wide open; but I've stuck by him in honor

an' in disgrace an' I'm stickin' by him to the grave. He's the biggest man that ever comes to Panamint, an' he's never bigger in my heart than he is the day he's lyin' in state in the Mission.

An' that orthodox parson from Philip's old church comes down an' offers his services to preach our Philip's funeral sermon. I ain't got no quarrel with this new parson an' I'm feelin' too bad to insult him even if I wanted to; so I just says: "No, thank you, parson. I guess we'll use our home talent"—an' we do! Chappie Ellerton officiates.

Hank Bartlett gets out an extra o' the Panamint Nugget, with big black borders an' heavy black type. The entire issue is devoted to Philip, an' it brings every man, woman an' child in Panamint to Philip's funeral. Even ol' Silvertip's there, with the other elders. I'm for orderin' 'em out o' the cemetery—when I see Silvertip's broke up somethin' awful. I dunno what made me do it, but I walk up an' tap him on the shoulder; an' when he looks round at me I hold out my hand.

"Randall," I says, "I thought I hated you; but I find I don't. I guess I've been round Philip too long. I can't disgrace him now by holdin' a grudge agin you."

Pore ol' Silvertip breaks down an' cries like a child.

"We crucified him!" he says. "We crucified him, Mr. Redfield, an' we never knew it!"

"He never held it agin you," I says. "His last words was, 'Chuckwalla, I am content. No crown without a cross!'"

Then I steps over to Silvertip's parson. Chappie has just finished readin': "I am the resurrection an' the life"—an' I know he can't go on without breakin' down. So I says to Silvertip's parson:

"Mebbe you'd be so kind as to forget I was a little stiff yesterday, an' render the closin' prayer?"

"I should be honored," he says, an' done it beautiful.

Son, Panamint divided over Philip, but it come together over him in the finish; an' I was satisfied. They'd licked us oncet, but Philip triumphs in the end; an' all the bitterness in Panamint goes into the grave with him an' stays there.

Old Chuckwalla Bill bit into his chewing tobacco and munched quietly for several seconds. Finally he glanced at me across the camp-fire.

"Son," he said, "would you like to visit the parsonage?"

I nodded assent and in a few minutes we were picking our way across the desert valley. Presently we ascended a gentle slope to a little mesa and Chuckwalla Bill led the way to a tall granite shaft rising out of the sage-brush. As he stooped and uprooted the sage that covered the "parsonage," I flashed a pocket electric torch on the face of the monument and read the epitaph of the parson of Panamint:

HERE LIES THE BODY

OF

PHILIP PHARO

A Minister of the Gospel of

Jesus Christ

On July 20, 1884, he saved two men and a woman from everlasting fire, receiving burns from which he never recovered. He went to his reward on September 22, 1887.

Erected by the Citizens of Panamint

For the Sinners and Publicans

WILLIAM E. REDFIELD

For the Scribes and Pharisees

ABSALOM RANDALL

"I allers make it a p'int to circle back this way every coupler years an' keep the sage from growin' up

round him," the old prospector explained. "I don't like that he should think I'm forgettin' him."

He stood gazing down into the valley, which was bathed in moonlight; and a coyote, catching the man-scent borne to him on the hot zephyr that floated up through Panamint, gave tongue on a distant butte. In an open space below us a jack rabbit hopped leisurely about his affairs, crickets whirred, and a little night bird chirped sleepily; but old Chuckwalla Bill neither heard nor saw, for he was gazing over the roofs of pine shanty and tenthouse in the city of his dreams; he was watching again the old, glorious, ruinous rout of fortune surging up and down Amethyst Avenue; he was listening again to Buckskin Liz tickling the ivory, and forgetting much that had come between. Presently he sighed and pointed into the valley.

"Son," he said plaintively, "I was mayor o' that city oncet."

The Land Just Over Yonder

TOYABE TOM JENNINGS was a desert rat, which in California and Nevada is the term applied to a certain well-defined type of whimsical old ne'er-do-well obsessed with the belief that he is a prospector. Why such an individual should be called a desert rat is not quite clear, unless it be that, like the rat, he spends much of his life in a hole, avoids mankind, is shy almost to the point of being furtive, and appears always to be engaged in a solution of the grub problem. However, if one be not inclined to conversational hair-splitting, the term "prospector" will do as well as the colloquial designation, for the reason that the desert rat is the prospector gone to seed.

Our particular desert rat, Toyabe Tom Jennings, might have been termed a mineralogical hobo on a perennial camping trip. He really believed he was searching for gold and other precious minerals, because he had started out in his youth with that intention. After he passed the half-century mark, however, he ceased to bring to the search the same vital enthusiasm that had sent him forth on his wanderings, although from force of habit he continued to go through the motions until with the passage of years he deceived himself. This was because the wilderness of mountain and desert had wrought a mystic spell upon him, stripping from him the veneer of civilization he had brought from the districts where it is a misdemeanor to discharge firearms within one hundred yards of a resi-

dence, and substituting therefor something of its own tremendous inconsequence. What if he didn't find the gold he sought? The search was at least exhilarating—and had not the ravens fed Elijah? Why worry?

It is said of men who have attained to Toyabe's state of mind that the desert has "gotten" them. When, where, how, or why this spell of the silence had gripped him Toyabe could not have told one. He only knew that when he left the desert he could hear it calling, calling, calling always—and he always went back. Most men seek happiness in wealth and worldly place, but Toyabe found his in the silence and perfect peace of the Great Outdoors. A bankrupt from January to December, he could never by any possibility be brought to a realization of his financial status, for a man is never a bankrupt with millions in sight. Toyabe was merely hard up. Dreamer of fantastic dreams, failure could never awaken him, for sunrise and sunset painted his landscapes with gold, while ever before him the little goblins of the waste marched, turning anon to beckon and point the road to The Land Just Over Yonder, for there lay his Eldorado.

Toyabe's tragedy of existence was no different from that of his fellows; hence he did not realize that he was doomed to a sorry end, because the end comes so gradually. As he grew older, the world—his world—grew colder. Each succeeding year, when misfortune pressed and the need of a grubstake became more and more imminent, he found men more skeptical than ever. Toyabe had a suspicion of these conditions occasionally, but like a true optimist he cussed a little harder and decided thereafter that he was holding his own. And when, despite his cussing and reiterated promises of "striking a lulu-bird" next year, black moods of depression settled upon him and he longed for human

society, he solved the problem by taking unto himself a partner. For one must have a partner who will listen respectfully to one's tale of fortunes in prospect, agree with one, dream with one, suffer with one, and rejoice with one when the water is reached at last; when the tarps are spread upon the ground and the coffee pot is bubbling; when the stars come out and the mountains squat like grim guardians of one's destiny, brooding away off there in the soft hush of the desert night; when the little voices of the waste begin to whisper—it is good to have a partner then. Thrice beloved is he who can walk with the desert rat and stand this acid test of friendship, for he endears himself by that powerful human attraction, the gift of sympathy.

Since he was a desert rat Toyabe chose for his partner another desert rat, for it is an immutable law of nature that birds of a feather shall flock together. All desert rats travel in pairs. Leaning upon each other, they journey cheerfully toward The Land Just Over Yonder, calm in the knowledge that at the rainbow's end the surviving partner will locate the final claim and do the assessment work for the other—a hole six feet long, three feet wide, and six feet perpendicular.

Up to the time he was fifty years old Toyabe had not felt any particular hankering for a partner. He acquired Bill King by accident, lost him the same way, found him again by accident, lost him— But why relate in a line a tale of “finders keepers, losers weepers”? Let us, like Toyabe Tom Jennings, make the start and then keep on going to the finish.

When Toyabe was about fifty years old he foregathered with Bill King, who was twenty-three, and at their very first meeting some vagrant sense of paternity denied moved Toyabe to rechristen his youthful partner. He called him Billy Boy. At the time, Billy Boy was

sadly in need of a change of climate. His health demanded it. A child of the cow country, he had ridden a Nevada range in Humboldt County at forty dollars a month until he discovered he might earn a hundred as a forest ranger. Thereupon in some mysterious manner he passed a civil-service examination and was told off to patrol the Toquina Forest Reserve, which in addition to a few million acres of scrubby fir and piñon pine on the slopes of the Toquina Range includes also a few leagues of most excellent desert.

He furnished his own horse and gun, and accompanied by a friendly collie dog and a little pack mule bearing his bed and board he commenced his gipsying. So the Open Country got Billy Boy, and when it catches them young that way it does a first-class job. Billy Boy could hear the little voices before he was twenty-three, about which time he had an argument with a Basque shepherd who couldn't produce the documents entitling him to graze his woollies on the government reserve.

It was not a long-drawn-out argument. The Basque decided it would be far easier to remove Billy Boy than the sheep, so from ambush he potted Billy Boy through the right shoulder at three hundred yards. The bullet lifted the ranger out of his saddle, and when he struck the ground he had the good sense to lie perfectly still. The Basque watched for five minutes, concluded he had done a thorough job and neglected to investigate and make certain, thus lending some color to the oft-repeated statement that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains. Imagine his surprise when Billy Boy came crawling into the sheep camp at dawn. He saw Billy Boy first, too, and drew a nice bead on him, but he had forgotten to remove the empty shell the night before, and Billy Boy beat him to the second shot.

Toyabe Tom Jennings, passing that way on his lifelong pilgrimage, came to the sheep camp to bargain for a haunch of mutton, for he was somewhat weary of bacon and canned goods. After he had made Billy Boy comfortable and rounded up the latter's horse and pack mule, he buried the Basque, in the performance of which corporal work of mercy he uncovered a pocket that netted him thirteen hundred dollars. Then he put carbolic salve, his great cure-all, on Billy Boy's wound, bandaged it with Billy Boy's shirt-tail, and levied liberally on the flock of the deceased for mutton broth for his patient.

Within a week three other Basques appeared, seeking the shepherd of the masterless flock, and Toyabe explained very politely that his partner had slain the missing one—and why. When they questioned his right to a sheep he was skinning, he said Billy Boy was entitled to exemplary damages; and since the Basques did not know what exemplary damages were they retired across the cañon and commenced shooting at Toyabe Tom, who helped himself to Billy Boy's rifle and sprang behind a rock, where he held his own until dark.

Then while the collie dog watched he packed the stock, broke camp, and got out of that country. He tied Billy Boy in his saddle and held him there until they reached Round Mountain, where a doctor relieved him, and when Billy Boy was well a coroner's jury exonerated him. Toyabe had by that time spent his thirteen hundred dollars in riotous living, grub, and a new pair of overalls, and was beginning to hear the little voices calling once more. However, he had taken a fancy to Billy Boy, and suggested that the lad's old beat in the Toquina Reserve was no longer tenable.

"Billy Boy," he declared, "'tain't wise to go back. If some of them Basques don't get you, at least three

o' their sperrits'll ha'nt you, so you better throw in with me an' go prospectin'."

Billy Boy agreed, and they "threw in" together. And as fate would have it they made better than good wages that year, and the gold fever claimed Billy Boy for the term of his natural life.

Despite the disparity in their ages they were ideal partners. Their natures dovetailed perfectly. Toyabe, having crossed the summit of life and started down the other side, loved Billy Boy for his youth. On his part Billy Boy could never forget the picture of Toyabe cementing his loyalty in the smoke. He always addressed Toyabe affectionately as "Ol'-Timer."

The partnership lasted five happy years, and then they made their strike at Cinnabar and put a city on the map of Nevada. Subsequently they sold their claim for a million dollars, and then Billy Boy went crazy. At least Toyabe in his charity called it that, although Billy Boy would admit to nothing more reprehensible than falling in love with a handsome young lady whose maternal grandmother had been a full-blooded Washoe squaw.

Now Toyabe was possessed of a certain prejudice against the North American Indian for the reason that his father had been scalped by a Sioux. Also he had known many half-breeds in his day—Mexicans and Indians—and he had never known a good one. To Toyabe's primitive way of thinking Billy Boy's girl was a squaw, and according to his code a squaw-man was in the same social category with rattlesnakes and ore thieves. Hence he felt he had a duty to perform, and a few days after Billy Boy announced his engagement he took the boy aside for a talk.

At first he confined his argument to eugenics. He said he had once known a mule skinner down at Lud-

low who had married just such a slashing fine quarter-bred girl as Billy Boy's, only she was a Shoshone. They had had a child which by some perverse freak of nature had harked back to first principles and was the spittin' image of the late Sitting Bull. Moreover, he had grown up to be a bad Indian. And when Billy Boy laughed at him, Toyabe flew into a rage, and warned Billy Boy that as one of the founders of the camp his social position would be jeopardized by an alliance with the lady of his choice.

"Why, she's prettier'n a sunset," Billy Boy declared; "an' if there's a white girl in this camp with half her style an' git-up, I've got to be shown. She can play the piano an' sing like an angel, and— Oh, hell's bells, Toyabe, I'm almost twenty-eight year old an' I'm plumb tired o' traipsin' around the country. I want to settle down, an' if you're wise you'll snaffle out a girl an' do likewise."

"Well, when I do," Toyabe snarled, "I won't pick no squaw, an' you can take the short end o' that bet an' play it to the limit."

"She ain't a squaw," Billy Boy retorted hotly. "She's three-quarters white, an' she's too durned good for any white man."

Toyabe hooted. "Is an octoroon a nigger?" he demanded.

"Of course," Billy Boy replied innocently.

"Then a quarter-bred Washoe girl is an Injun, an' a female Injun is a squaw, an' a man that takes up with a squaw is a squaw-man, an' a squaw-man—well, Billy Boy, I hope I don't have to tell you what a squaw-man is?"

"An' I never thought I'd see the day I'd have to tell you what you are," Billy Boy answered quietly. "Toyabe, you're an interferin' ol' fool, an' don't you talk

to me no more about my private affairs. I'm free, white, an' over twenty-one, an' I reckon I can play my own hand without any pointers from you."

It is quite possible that, ridiculous as it may sound, Toyabe was a little bit jealous, for he loved Billy Boy like a son. Also he was human, and therefore prone to hurt the thing he loved. Said he:

"Well, Billy Boy, have it your own way. I only got one thing to say an' then I'm through for keeps—these mixed bloods ain't got no moral sense. You keep your eye on this good-lookin' young squaw o' yourn or some low white man'll steal her from you when you ain't lookin'."

Billy Boy trembled with the scourge of that blunt statement, and for one brief instant there was murder in his glance. Then he saw the picture of Toyabe behind the rocks arguing with the Basque shepherds, and his hand came away from his gun.

"All right, Toyabe," he said in a hard, cold voice. "You've had your say an' now you're through for keeps"; and he turned and walked away. Toyabe didn't sleep that night, and in the morning he sought out Billy Boy and apologized. Billy Boy merely looked at him coolly and turned his back on him, and Toyabe thought his old heart was going to break. To keep it from breaking he went down to the Blue Bird, and ordered wine for everybody, for a man gets lonely without his partner and Toyabe wanted the Blue Bird sirens to sing to him and drown the little voices that kept calling to him: "Get out of this camp, Toyabe. You can't stay in the same camp with Billy Boy when he ain't speakin' to you. Get a new partner an' drift."

And Toyabe's agonized soul cried out in answer: "I can't drift. I'm rich. I must stay till my money is gone."

He did. He had many friends and his half-million dollars was dissipated within a year, every day of which Billy Boy passed him by with averted face. And when Toyabe was down to his last five hundred dollars he outfitted himself and a gentle, kindly, burned little gnome of a man, a desert mystic, by name Hassyampa Jim Titus, and together they had fared forth to The Land Just Over Yonder.

For the second time in ten years Toyabe Tom Jennings was minus a partner. Hassyampa Jim Titus had just perished of blood poisoning in the Painted Hills.

The old man had seemed to realize that he was headed for the New Jerusalem and appeared to be rather glad of it, for, as he remarked an hour before he grew delirious, he had lived a happy life in which he had wronged neither man, woman nor child, and inasmuch as he was about a thousand years old anyhow the only respectable thing he could do would be to "kick the bucket"—which was a philosophy born of forty years in the silence. Death had walked with him too often and too far, and Hassyampa knew that horror for the fraud he is.

However, Toyabe had to sit and listen to Hassyampa's prattling after the old man went "loco"—and it was all about a woman! From the little that Toyabe could gather she had broken his heart, yet for forty years she had remained enshrined in the fragments. Toyabe had never loved a woman and he found it a little hard to comprehend.

When he passed, Toyabe wrapped him in his soiled old gray-woolen blankets and installed him in his last dry camp; a true desert rat, he gave Hassyampa haven in their abandoned prospect hole. Then he cut some cactus and threw it on the grave in order that coyotes

might not disturb old Hassyampa's dreaming, and with the accomplishment of this final rite of friendship he packed the burros and headed back to civilization, for the desert was very lonely now, and he wanted another partner.

As we have intimated previously, much communing with Nature had made a philosopher of Toyabe Tom Jennings; hence the parched earth above Jim Titus, though famished with thirst, drank not of Toyabe's tears. When he was ready to leave he looked wistfully toward the cactus heap and said aloud: "Good-by, pardner." Then he clucked to the jacks and pushed on down Jawbone Cañon and out into the hot dry expanse of Big Smoky Valley, where the heat shimmers in the beautiful blue haze and the twister breezes make the dust devils dance among the stunted sage. Far to the southwest, where the yellow soil of Big Smoky merged with the red oxides and black hematite of a mountain range, lay Cinnabar, two sleeps distant, and thither he was bound.

He had left Cinnabar in the days when it was still a rough-and-ready mining camp, while now, although it was scarcely four years old, it was the county seat of Cinnabar County. This fact added to the interest Toyabe felt in the camp—for so he still persisted in calling this city of fifteen thousand inhabitants—when its outlying houses commenced to loom up out of the haze that has given to this desert valley the significant name it bears. Particularly was he interested in a large building that stood on the outskirts of the camp. He could see this building while yet he was fifteen miles from Cinnabar, for in that atmosphere it did not appear to be more than three miles distant, and the sight of it induced mild speculation anent the camp and gave him surcease from the poignant stab of loneli-

ness that had been his since Hassyampa Jim Titus had died. He wondered if Cinnabar had forgotten him in the two years he had been away, although the thought brought to his leathery countenance a little grim, cryptic smile. It did not seem possible that they could forget him so soon. He had been too picturesque a public character for that!

With the thought of Cinnabar came a revival of his interest in Billy Boy. Was the lad a father now, and had the child reverted to type? Had Billy Boy conserved his share of their one big strike, or had he, like Toyabe, frittered it away? If perchance he should meet Billy Boy in Cinnabar tonight, would the latter speak to him for old sake's sake, or should he, Toyabe, speak first and ask Billy Boy to have a little drink? If he asked the boy to have a drink the invitation might appear perfunctory, whereas if Billy Boy was asked to have a "little" drink—Well, somehow that would be different.

Toyabe rehearsed aloud to the horned toads and lizards the exact wording of his speech and the inflection he would employ if, when he and Billy Boy met, the latter's glance had lost a measure of its hostility. He planned to say: "Why, hel-lo, Billy Boy! Well! Well! Well! Ain't seen you for a month o' Sundays. How've you been anyhow, you young walloper? Come an' have a little drink with your ol' Tom-pardner, Billy Boy."

In the event that Billy Boy should accept they would discuss many things and have numerous little drinks—but not too much—and at parting Toyabe would say: "Well, I guess I'll have to drift. See you again, Billy Boy, an' in the meantime give my love to the missus." And that should be all of his apology. It appeared to Toyabe that this remark would cover a multitude of

sad explanations and embarrassing memories and that nothing further would be necessary, for after all Billy Boy had one great virtue even if he was a squ—Well, he had the virtue of being able to understand without a diagram and directions for using.

Toyabe's point of view on women had not changed materially since he and Billy Boy had parted. Indeed, the delirious babblings of Hassyampa Jim Titus kept recurring to him as he trudged toward Cinnabar, and strengthened his preconceived notion that if a man was to accomplish things in this busy world he should beware of entangling alliances. On the contrary, however, those same delirious babblings had opened Toyabe's eyes to something of which he had hitherto been in ignorance, and that was love. A woman had broken Hassyampa's heart forty years ago, and he had forgiven her and loved her until death.

Toyabe would not have believed hitherto that any man could possibly have cared that much. The sublimity of Hassyampa's simple abnegation awed him, and caused him to compare it with his own inflexible code of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If he had ever loved a woman that way and she had hurt him wantonly, he would have hated her; and then quite suddenly he asked himself this question: "If I had loved a woman as Billy Boy loved that Washoe girl, and Billy Boy had spoken of her—that way, what would I have done?" Toyabe found himself unable to answer that question to his own satisfaction, but from his self-examination he emerged with a clearer understanding of the terrible hurt he had dealt Billy Boy when he struck at the girl across the lad's shoulder.

"I'll go to Dan Briscoe," he declared aloud, "an' tell Dan all about it, an' ask him to write me a high-class letter of apology to Billy Boy. Then I'll wait a

couple o' days for Billy Boy to think it over, an' we'll see if we can't get together again. That course is a heap more dignified an' polite than bracin' right up an' takin' a chance he speaks to me."

Dan Briscoe was the editor and proprietor of the Cinnabar Expositor, and between him and Toyabe a warm friendship existed. In the zenith of his glory as a mining-camp Croesus, Toyabe had staked Briscoe to sufficient capital to start the Expositor; indeed, the editor still owed him two thousand dollars on the original loan of five thousand.

Out of the haze of Big Smoky the houses grew more and more distinct, and presently Toyabe saw that the large building that had first attracted his attention was not a public library as he had supposed. For there was a severity of outline about this building, standing there on the edge of the camp with the desert snarling at its very walls, that marked it as an architectural outcast, and presently Toyabe knew that gray stone pile for what it was—the Cinnabar County jail.

By the time he had reached the outskirts of the camp the sun was casting long, level beams across Big Smoky, softening the diabolical perspective of the Painted Hills, banishing the heat haze, and working its spell of enchantment on the desert by metamorphosing it from a vast, aching desolation to a beautiful country that called to at least one human being to come forth and revel with it in its borrowed grandeur. For as Toyabe debouched from the desert and passed within a block of the jail he saw a man clinging to the gratings at an upstairs window—a man who thrust his arm through the bars and waved it, the while he shouted to the old desert rat:

"He-y-y-y, pardner! Where you from?"

Only a countryman will shout that way to a perfect

stranger a block distant; and without pausing to reason why the knowledge came to him Toyabe knew that the man behind the bars was one of his own people.

"Hello there, neighbor!" he called back cheerily. "I'm from the Painted Hills."

"Seen anything o' Toyabe Tom Jennings an' Hassyampa Jim Titus out there?" the prisoner shouted, and Toyabe thought he detected an expectant, hopeful ring in the man's voice.

"Now, I wonder who that misfortunate can be," Toyabe reflected. "He don't recognize me on account o' my whiskers an' bein' so far off. That's what comes o' losin' Billy Boy. He allers would make me shave." Aloud he said: "Yep, I seen 'em. Hassyampa's dead—blood poison. Know him?"

"A little. But how about Toyabe?"

"Same ol' wuthless character. He's fair to middlin'."

"He'll be comin' back to Cinnabar for another pardner, won't he?"

"I reckon he will, neighbor. A feller's got to have a pardner."

"Say, if you meet up with Toyabe, will you tell him somethin' for me?"

"Sure shot. What'll it be?"

"Tell him Billy Boy'd like to see him."

Toyabe's heart leaped with a joy that was almost pain. "I mos' certainly will do that, neighbor," he shouted, after a brief pause of astonishment. "Drat the luck!" he added to himself. "If it wasn't so blamed embarrassin' to have to meet a friend in the calaboose I reckon I'd climb up an' kiss that feller. I guess I'd better not let on who I am." So, in order to close the conversation without appearing discourteous, he yelled:

"So long, neighbor. I'm right thirsty and headed for water."

"I never knew this country to have such a hot fall," the other answered. "Here it is the first of October an' you'd think it was July."

"It's right nippy layin' out nights."

"I bet it is. But it's great to lay out nights when it's nippy. When you wake up about three o'clock in the mornin' an' the fire's about out, an' you crawl out cussin' an' put more sage on the coals—eh, pardner, pretty fine, eh?"

"I see you been there," Toyabe shouted back, and turned the corner into Silver Avenue, where he promptly forgot the man at the jail window in his amazement at the growth of the town. Where once they had sold water by the barrel and only a millionaire could afford a daily bath, they now had a public watering trough in front of the Blue Bird, while across the town, ten blocks distant, the cupola of the new courthouse towered above office building and a false-fronted frame shanty.

"I knew she was comin' right along when I seen that big new jail an' the feller lookin' out the winder," Toyabe soliloquized, "but I'll be swindled if I looked for anything like this. Yes, sir, Cinnabar's shore a hummer."

His burros broke into a trot, braying with pleasurable anticipation as they smelled the water in the Blue Bird trough. Toyabe followed stiffly and drank from the faucet at one end of the trough; then, straightening up, meditatively he wiped the glistening drops from his long gray beard and gazed upon the entrance to the Blue Bird. From within came the notes of a piano, hard-driven and sadly in need of tuning. A man with a nasal tenor was singing a syncopated melody descrip-

tive of the charms of his baby doll; above the lilting chorus, Toyabe detected the incessant ring of cash registers, the crash of pool balls and the falsetto laughter of a Blue Bird siren.

He had planned to make a characteristic entrance to the Blue Bird and invite all hands to step up and name their poison; yet now that he stood just outside the door the place had no attraction for him.

"That feller in the jail winder has plumb spoiled my home-comin'," he murmured. "That noise is too durned noisy for me. Crack along, jacks, an' we'll hive up somewhere an' scoff."

In the rear of the office of the Cinnabar Expositor he found an inclosed lot, into which he drove his burros and unpacked. Then he went uptown, purchased half a sack of rolled barley, with which he fed the famished little beasts, and, this primal duty performed, sought a cheap neighboring restaurant and dined himself. At about half past seven he dropped in on Dan Briscoe.

The editor blessed the returned prodigal, for news was scarce that night and Hassyampa Jim and Toyabe Tom were each worth a column—the former because he had died, and the latter because he had once owned a half-interest in a now famous mine and had helped put Cinnabar on the map.

"You'll write up a nice piece about Hassyampa an' print it on the front page, won't you, Dan?" Toyabe pleaded.

"Naturally," Dan Briscoe answered. "What are your plans, Toyabe?"

"I dunno, Dan. I reckoned, if it was convenient, you might manage to keep me in spendin' money for a year on the balance of that ol' loan—"

"You shall have the entire amount, principal and

interest, tomorrow morning, Toyabe. I'd have sent it long ago had I known your post-office address."

"Thanks, Dan, but I don't charge my friends no interest on an accommodation loan. You just let me have the principal, if it's convenient, an' I'll be happy. Speakin' o' my plans, however, I reckon I'll just be quietlike an' set around with people awhile. If I could get some kind of a job here in Cinnabar I'd try to behave myself like a pet fawn. After a man passes the sixty mark, Dan, he gets kinder tame, you know."

"What kind of a job would you like, Toyabe?"

"Oh, I dunno, Dan. Somethin' dignified—time-keeper in a mine or a soft political snap. I'm not particular."

Dan Briscoe's face lighted with a brilliant inspiration. "Toyabe," he cried, "how would you like to be sheriff of Cinnabar County?"

"Would a cat eat liver?"

"Then," Dan Briscoe declared, "I'll try to land the office for you. We elected Pat Cadogan last November, but he died a week ago, and the county commissioners meet tonight to appoint his successor for the unexpired term. There are five commissioners, four of whom are deadlocked over two candidates, with the fifth and deciding vote on the fence. There isn't a man in Cinnabar County that isn't your friend, and if I go up there right away and spring your name as a compromise candidate—"

He seized his hat and rushed out, leaving Toyabe alone in his sanctum, where the old man spent the succeeding two hours reading old copies of the *Expositor*. Shortly after ten o'clock Dan Briscoe came whooping in.

"Well, I put you over, Toyabe," he announced; "and you take the oath of office tomorrow afternoon."

"How—how did you do it?" Toyabe sputtered.

"Oh, I'm something of a political boss, Toyabe, and it doesn't do a man in Cinnabar County politics any good to have the Expositor knocking him. You got three out of the five votes."

Toyabe, surprised and delighted, attempted to express his gratitude, but Dan Briscoe shouldered him good-naturedly out of his den. "One good turn deserves another, Toyabe," he declared. "Shut up and get out of here, I have work to do."

So Toyabe went out in the lot and leaned across the back of a burro and smoked and meditated, and resolved to settle down now and prove himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him by the great commonwealth of Cinnabar. As he spread his tarpaulin in the sand and rolled himself up in his blankets he rejoiced that he had been the recipient of this honor at the hands of the people on the eve of his reunion with Billy Boy.

Toyabe did not formally take over the office of sheriff the next day, for what with the acquisition of a shave, a haircut, a bath, store clothes, and congratulations without number, the day was almost gone before he had filed his bonds and taken the oath of office. He merely had time for a brief visit to the jail with Dan Briscoe, who introduced him to his deputies, jailers and other attachés of the office.

When he reported for duty next morning, however, it was characteristic of him to do so before sunrise, for Toyabe had been rising at the first streak of dawn for the greater portion of his life, and he had not been in politics sufficiently long to have acquired the tent-till-four habit. Early as he was, however, the chief deputy was there before him.

"Hello," Toyabe greeted him, "I didn't know you slept at the jail."

"I do not," the other replied, "but I had to get down early this morning. I've got to take Washoe William down to the state penitentiary at Carson City to be hung, and the train leaves at eight-thirty. That is," he added, wondering what Toyabe's early arrival might portend, "unless you figure on taking him down yourself."

"I hadn't heard about him," Toyabe replied, "an' I guess, if he's goin' to be hung, I don't care to have anything to do with him. Ridin' from Cinnabar to Carson City with a condemned man is a duty I ain't anxious to perform, son. Two days in such gloomy society would give me the fidgets, so you'd better 'tend to it. But before you light out, tell me who's that feller in the second-story cell in the wing facin' out on Big Smoky."

"You mean the fellow that stands at the window all the time?"

"I reckon that's the correct description."

"That's Washoe William. From daylight to dark he's at that window, and sometimes when it's dark the other prisoners tell me they can hear him tussling with the bars. Then when he's all worn out he cries like a kid until he falls asleep. He's the fellow that killed the county assessor."

"I want to see this Washoe William," Toyabe replied, "so I'd be obliged, son, if you was to lead me to his cell an' give me the key to it. I want to have a little private talk with him."

"Certainly," the deputy replied, and two minutes later Toyabe found himself inserting the big steel key in the door of Washoe William's cell. As he stepped inside he saw that the prisoner was in his old place at

the window, his face pressed against the bars while his yearning gaze wondered out over Big Smoky. For it was sunrise on the desert, and the sunrise, like the sunset, decks the waste in transient glory. The night shadows still hung in the cañons of the distant Painted Hills, but the oxide crests were aflame with the day that as yet was scarcely born. From Cinnabar across Big Smoky a white ribbon of trail wound into the eastern horizon, and down this trail the dawn light was sweeping like the herald of a great celestial spectacle. Through the open window filtered a breath of air, and it had in it the tang of early fall and the fragrant odor of sage. From afar came the cadence of a coyote complaint, and as Toyabe locked the cell door behind him he saw Washoe William's big hands reach up and grip the bars and shake them, while from his great breast escaped a sigh that was half a sob.

"Mornin', pardner," Toyabe saluted him. "I'm the new sheriff, Tom Jennings, Toyabe Tom, the feller you was askin' about the other night—"

The prisoner whirled from the window, and in the haggard wretch before him Toyabe recognized the loved young partner of happier days; he understood now why they called him Washoe William!

"Billy Boy!" he cried, and rushed forward with outstretched arms.

"Ol'-Timer!" Billy Boy replied in a choking voice, and then Toyabe's arms were round him and the boy was sobbing out the agony of his broken heart on the sheriff's shoulder.

Now when one partner goes to pieces that way it is up to the other to keep his head, and in this emergency Toyabe kept his. He spoke no word, but held Billy Boy to his heart and let him weep. And after a long time Billy Boy said:

"Ol'-Timer, I thought you wasn't ever goin' to come until too late. They're goin' to take me down to Carson today—and hang me for killin' a skunk—that wasn't worth—the powder. Yes, Ol'-Timer, they're goin' to hang your—Billy-pardner—"

Toyabe Tom Jennings' jaws came together in a queer twisted smile.

"I'm damned if they're goin' to," he retorted. "I got two thousand dollars Dan Briscoe paid me yesterday, an' I can borrow a thousand more, now that I'm sheriff, an' we'll fight this thing, Billy Boy. We'll carry it to the Supreme Court—"

"It's been carried, Ol'-Timer," Billy Boy answered hopelessly. "The high court turned me down day before yesterday an' the judge has ordered 'em to take me to the penitentiary. I swing in three weeks."

Still again Toyabe smiled his queer twisted smile. He shook his head. They weren't going to hang his Billy Boy; not much they weren't.

"They app'inted me sheriff to fill Pat Cadogan's unexpired term, Billy Boy," he explained. "I s'pose"—and the queer twisted smile was once more in evidence—"you'd ruther have Ol'-Timer take you down to the penitentiary instead o' his chief deputy."

"That'll help a heap, pardner," Billy Boy replied brokenly. "It sure will."

"Then that's settled," Toyabe declared. "We're scheduled to leave at eight-thirty, so dry your eyes, Billy Boy, an' me 'n' you'll have breakfast together downstairs. Then I'll take a run uptown an' you be ready by the time I get back. How are you off for a goin'-away suit, son?"

Billy Boy said he had a good one in a locker downstairs with his other clothing, and under the stimulus of Toyabe's cheerful presence he pulled himself to-

gether and followed the old man downstairs to breakfast in the dining-room for the jail attachés. After breakfast Toyabe turned his prisoner over to the deputy with instructions to get Billy Boy ready for the journey, while he hurried uptown. Straight for the Blue Bird he headed. The swampers were at work mopping down the floor as he entered, and at a roulette wheel a sleepy member of the graveyard shift sat dozing.

"Son," Toyabe queried gently of this individual, "I've got \$1,972.28 in the bank, the bank don't open until ten o'clock, an' I'm leavin' for Carson City with a prisoner at eight-thirty. How about you?"

"Write your check, Toyabe," the gambler answered, and added reflectively: "Seems like old times, Toyabe, cashin' your checks. Don't spend it all in Carson."

Toyabe gathered up the gold and currency and went back to the jail. The deputy sheriff was waiting with Billy Boy, handcuffed, and at Toyabe's approach he handed the old desert rat the keys to the cuffs.

"Sho!" Toyabe protested. "You don't have to hobble Billy Boy"; and he unlocked the handcuffs and tossed them into a corner. "Come, son," and he took his prisoner by the arm and walked with him to the depot. On the way uptown they stopped in at the Blue Bird and had that long-delayed little drink together, as in happier days. Then they boarded the train, and as it pulled out both Billy Boy and Toyabe instinctively turned and looked back at the town, for both were looking upon Cinnabar for the last time. Each heaved a little sigh as he straightened round in his seat.

"An' now, Billy Boy," said Toyabe, "seein' as I've got time to listen to it, sing the song or tell the story."

Toyabe Tom Jennings, sheriff of Cinnabar, had been absent from his official duties six days before the under-

sheriff became suspicious and wired the warden of the state penitentiary at Carson City to know if Sheriff Jennings had arrived on the fifth of the month, conveying a prisoner, William King, under sentence of death. He received a reply in the negative and immediately Cinnabar had a sensation which within three days developed into a scandal.

Dan Briscoe did his best to allay public sentiment against Sheriff Tom Jennings. He pointed out that even had the latter connived at the prisoner's escape, he would probably have sufficient regard for his job to return to Cinnabar with some sort of tale in an endeavor to alibi himself. Briscoe took the stand that, some time during the night run to Reno, Washoe William had taken advantage of the old man's trustfulness to leap from the moving train. Possibly he had hurled the sheriff from the train. Accordingly a search was made along the right of way for the bodies of one or both of the missing men. They were not found. Then the conductor of the train that carried Toyabe and his charge as far as Reno was questioned, and he declared that both men were aboard as the train pulled into Hazen, because Toyabe had asked him how long they stopped for supper. He did not recall seeing them after that, but then he had been in a car ahead during the remainder of the run to Reno, making up the account of his trip. The brakeman said he thought they had left the train at Reno, and the peanut butcher, anxious to be in the limelight, declared they had.

Now it is the custom with sheriffs en route to Carson City with prisoners who find themselves compelled to lie over in Reno all night, to lodge their charges for that night in Reno city prison. The Cinnabar deputy-sheriff declared he had informed Toyabe that this official courtesy would be extended to him upon request,

but the Reno chief of police stated that Sheriff Jennings had not availed himself of the privilege. Neither could Toyabe's signature be found on any of the hotel registers in Reno, and when two weeks had passed, Cinnabar County, to a man, came to the conclusion that Toyabe Tom Jennings had been false to his oath of office; that he had not only aided his ex-partner to escape but had fled with him, for an examination of Toyabe's modest bank account appeared to indicate that he had financed the trip. It was believed that they had continued on to San Francisco or Los Angeles and were now in Mexico. Or, perhaps, they had taken passage on some steamer bound for Honduras, which has no extradition treaty with the United States.

At any rate, wherever they were, the Cinnabar authorities decided they ought to be in jail. So the County Commissioners met in special session and declared the office of sheriff vacant and appointed a man to fill it, after which they offered a reward of one thousand dollars for William King, dead or alive. The district attorney called a meeting of the Grand Jury, an indictment was returned against Toyabe Tom Jennings, and the hue and cry was on in earnest.

The warden of the Nevada State Penitentiary just outside Carson City entertained a friend at luncheon on October twenty-seventh. After luncheon the guest expressed a desire to visit the prison, so they strolled through the warden's grim hostelry, their tour of inspection ending in the warden's comfortable private office. Here they were interrupted presently by the entrance of the captain of the yard.

"Warden," he announced, "I've got a crazy old desert rat out at the gate. He's certainly got dust in his garret. He has a hallucination that he's the runaway sheriff of

Cinnabar County and says he's brought his prisoner in to get hanged tomorrow."

"Well, has he brought his prisoner in?"

"No."

"Then what does he want?"

"He won't tell me. Insists on seeing you. Says you're the only man he can do business with. When I asked him where he'd left his prisoner he said the fellow was down the road a piece minding the jacks."

The warden and his guest smiled. "So he left the jacks to guard a man I'm supposed to hang tomorrow morning, eh?" the former replied. "Who is this man? Or rather, what is he?"

"A typical desert rat about sixty years old. I didn't have the heart to dismiss the old fellow, because he appears to be all broken up. He says the prisoner is his partner. I think the old chap's demented."

"I should say he is. Get rid of him, captain."

"I've tried hard but I can't. He insists he has something for your private ear."

"Ah, I understand. He has come to plead with me for his partner's life. Well, captain, that's easily arranged. Show the old chap in." The warden turned to his guest. "The desert gets them in the long run," he explained. "Too much solitude. But probably this old codger is as harmless as a baby. He's probably been reading in the papers about the sheriff of Cinnabar County who started for here with an old side-kicker of his condemned to death. Of course you've heard of the case. They never showed up here, as per schedule, and as near as we can learn the sheriff not only financed his prisoner's getaway, but skedaddled with him. They're in Mexico or Central America now, and here we have this dotty old desert rat imagining he's the absconding sheriff and that his partner is the prisoner."

"A queer brand of lunacy, strikes me," his friend replied.

"Not at all uncommon. Take, for instance, Old Harry the Owl, one of my birds here. Harry went off his head on religion and now he imagines he's King Solomon. Why, I give Harry the Owl a light in his cell nights so he can get out his revised edition of the Proverbs. And as for these desert rats, they all go queer in the long run, like sheep herders. Take particular note of this old chap's eyes. Come in!"

Toyabe Tom Jennings entered. He was wearing the same wide white hat beneath which he had left Cinnabar, but his neat black suit of "store" clothes had been replaced by a soiled canvas coat with lamb's wool lining, a heavy woolen shirt, blue overalls, and short miner's boots well worn at heel and toe. From under the tail of the canvas coat the end of a battered pistol holster protruded. A three week's growth of white stubble covered his face, and the corners of his mouth and his chin were stained with tobacco juice. He had a large cud in his cheek, and the moment he stepped inside he glanced round for a spot whereon he might expectorate. The warden hastened to indicate a tall brass cuspidor. Toyabe nodded his thanks, spat, sat down and shied his hat onto the warden's flat-topped desk. A little cloud of alkali dust arose from it.

"Be you the warden?" he piped, addressing that functionary, who bowed; whereupon Toyabe jerked his head like a screech owl. "I'm Sheriff Tom Jennings, of Cinnabar," he announced, "an' I've brought in my pardner, Bill King, to get hung."

"Indeed! Why, what appears to be the trouble between you and Bill?" the warden queried.

"Oh, hell," Toyabe answered wearily, "there ain't no trouble between me an' Billy Boy now. We patched

that ol' fuss up for good an' all." He sighed and continued tremulously: "Warden, it's sure hard on me, in my official capacity, a-havin' to bring Billy Boy in to be stretched. It's mos' almighty hard!"

"I quite realize that, sheriff," the warden answered sympathetically. "But still, I suppose it can't be helped, and 'what can't be cured must be endured.'"

"Well, this thing can't be cured, but you can help me endure it, warden. I got a little favor to ask you." And Toyabe glanced ever so quickly toward the warden's friend.

"Oh, he's all right," the warden assured him. "Whatever you've got to say, sheriff, is strictly between friends, and whatever your favor is, I'll grant it if I can."

"You can grant this one, warden," Toyabe quavered, touched by the warden's sympathy. He took out a villainous old red bandanna handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "I shore do appreciate your sperrit, warden, an' so'll Billy Boy. Now under the law you've got to swing Billy Boy between sunrise an' sunset tomorrow." The warden nodded solemnly and Toyabe continued:

"I wish you'd do it at sun-up, warden, becuz then Billy Boy won't have to set in a cell an' wait for it. You see, warden, I thought mebbe if I asked you an' explained how it is with me an' Billy Boy you wouldn't mind lettin' me have him tonight. We'll make a dry camp over yonder in the field an' I wish you'd let us, becuz it's a-goin' to be our last night together on this here earth, an'—an'— But we'll be up early, warden, an' all you've got to do is to come to the front gate an'—give us the—high sign—when you're ready—"

He broke down completely and laid his old head, all snowy and unkempt, on the warden's desk. "We don't want—no fuss an' feathers to—this killin'," he sobbed.

"I want my Billy Boy to—jus' come a-strollin' across the field like a—white man, head up—an' whistlin'—when you call him. He sees you by the gate—an' he says: 'Mornin, warden'; an' you say: 'Mornin', Billy Boy. Had your breakfas'?' An' he'll say: 'Yes, thank you, warden. Me an' Toyabe scoffed as per—usual—an hour ago.' An' then you say: 'Well, come along, son,' an' him an' you walks friendly-like to the pl-place—where you hang folks; only be—before you get—there—you step to one side—an' let a passel—o' guards—shoot him through the heart. In this state it's my understandin' that—a condemned man's got the—right to choose—his own finish—shootin' or hangin', an' I'm choosin' for—Billy Boy. You shoot him—when he ain't—expectin' it, an' I'll come—arterwards an' take him—away—"

Another sob mingled with Toyabe's, and the warden, turning to gaze with misty eyes upon his guest, observed that the latter was weeping like a great, lubberly boy. For they had expected Toyabe to plead for a life; and here he was, hopeless, and pleading pathetically for a figment of honor in a dishonored death.

"Get that hysterical old lunatic out of here," the warden's friend whispered. "He's tearing my heart out."

"The only way I can do it is to introduce you as the governor of the state and have you pardon Billy Boy," the warden replied, and the other nodded his approval.

More accustomed, perhaps, to scenes of woe than his guest, the warden quickly regained his composure. He stepped to Toyabe and patted him on the shoulder. "There, there," he soothed; "buck up, Old-Timer, and listen to the good news." He shook Toyabe. "Listen!" he commanded. "Billy Boy isn't going to be hanged and he isn't going to be shot."

"Then what are you a-goin' to do with him?" Toyabe gasped. "Commute his sentence to imprisonment for life? I'd druther see him shot an' out of his misery than stuck behind the bars in this hell-hole. I'd—"

"Let me finish, sheriff. This gentleman here is the governor of the state of Nevada—"

"What!"

"Yes, he's the governor," and the warden winked at his guest. "Governor," he continued, addressing the latter, "now really, don't you think this is one case where you can extend executive clemency? What's the use hanging this Billy Boy? You see how much the sheriff thinks of him. Why, no man could be really bad and still inspire such a sacred friendship—"

"Warden," Toyabe interrupted, "he's the lovin'est, the sweetest-natured boy, that ever was. Many's the time Billy Boy's lied an' said he wasn't thirsty, so his ol' Tom-pardner could have the water. An' I want to tell you, governor, a lie like that a-comin' from lips that's black an' swollen—oh, governor, won't you please pardon him? When me an' the jacks give out once that boy toted me on his back four mile to water. He ain't no drawin'-room graduate, governor; he ain't no hand-shakin' lady's man, but, oh, governor, he's got guts an' to spare."

"I am convinced, sheriff," the "governor" replied, "that Billy Boy is all that you say he is. His trial, if I may judge from the newspaper reports, was an outrageous miscarriage of justice. That Cinnabar judge certainly gave him a mighty raw deal—"

"You're damn' whistlin' he did!" Toyabe shrilled.

"And so," the "governor" continued, "I'm going to grant Billy Boy a full pardon, and then I want you two to get to hell out of here."

"Put her there, pardner. God bless you for a decent

honest white man in a nigger world," and Toyabe seized the "governor's" hand and wrung it in both of his.

"And whatever you do," the warden warned him, "keep this under your hat. Now, don't you and Billy Boy go down town tonight and celebrate by getting drunk, because if you get drunk you'll talk, and if you talk you'll have forty people a week coming in to cry on the governor's shoulder. Understand?"

"Understand? Understand? Why, warden, compared to me an' Billy Boy for silence on this here subject the Spink herself is noisier'n a band o' sheep. But, governor—now, governor, I sure hate to appear to presume on good natur' an' brief acquaintance, as the feller says, but—er—couldn't you give me the pardon paper now, so's I could tote it out to Billy Boy? He's waitin' for me down by the gate with the jacks."

"Well, hardly today, sheriff. I quit working at twelve o'clock. And then the pardon paper has to bear the Great Seal of the State of Nevada, and they lock the Great Seal up in a time vault as soon as I leave my office. And then there's a lot of red tape to a pardon—got to bring it up before the pardon board; and besides, my secretary— Why, sheriff, if you knew the work that boy has ahead of him you'd feel sorry for him. But don't you worry, sheriff. Whatever I say goes with the pardon board, and in the course of a few days I'll have my secretary make out the pardon and mail it to you. In the meantime Billy Boy is free. Nobody's going to ask any questions, and if they do just refer them to me or to the warden."

"Well, o' course," Toyabe replied, a little abashed, "I ain't insistin' or misdoubtin' your word, governor, an' if the warden is agreeable to takin' the resk I am too."

"What risk is there to take?" the warden demanded.

"Well, that danged coyote of a judge up in Cinnabar might take a notion to come pesterin' around, askin' embarrassin' questions, so we better do this thing regular. You give me a receipt for Billy Boy, delivered in good order, an' that let's me out. Then the governor pardons Billy Boy, an' that lets you out. That's right, ain't it?"

The two men nodded. "Then," Toyabe continued calmly, "we'll go to it. I jus' naturally got to explain my conduct to Dan Briscoe. Dan, he's got me the app'intment as sheriff, an' the way things look now I've let him down. But when I mail him this receipt he'll print it in the *Expositor* an' that'll square me with my friends again. They can't say I didn't make good, even if I did take my time about it." He cackled in almost senile glee, took a dirty white envelop from the inner breast pocket of his canvas coat and handed it to the warden. "There's the commitment papers an' the receipt," he said.

The warden opened the envelop, glanced at its contents, and silently handed them over to his friend, who read them carefully. His glance was very serious as it met the warden's.

"Well," he queried gently, "who's loony now?"

"Why, ain't them papers in apple-pie order?" Toyabe demanded, suddenly appalled with the thought that something had slipped at the last minute and Billy Boy would be hanged after all.

"That's what's wrong with them," was the answer. "They're too blamed well in order." Then he saw the fright in Toyabe's eyes—eyes a little squinty and puckered at the corners, kind, blue, deep-set and brilliant—the orbs of a visionary; and he hastened to back water. "They have more red tape about a simple paper like

this than is at all necessary," he declared. "Why, a man has to read a page of whereases and aforesaids to get at the meat of the argument. Still, I guess they're regular enough, so you'd better sign them, warden," and he tossed the papers over to that unhappy official.

"Tell me about Billy Boy," he said, and turned his back deliberately on the warden's accusing glare. "What are the inside facts of that killing up in Cinnabar? Just what did Billy Boy do?"

Toyabe hitched his chair over and prepared to argue the question. "Why, governor," he declared, "that boy didn't do nothin' 'ceptin' red this here earth of a polecat. It happens this way, an' no matter what anybody else tells you, don't you believe him, becuz Billy Boy told me this himself an' that boy never told a lie in his life, exceptin' he wanted to be kind to somebody. Back here a couple o' years ago the lad falls deep in love with a quarter-bred Washoe girl, which I don't cotton to her nohow, but agin my advice he marries her. He's plumb crazy about her, an' her—well, she's plumb crazy about Billy Boy's bank-roll. He builds her a forty-thousand-dollar house in Cinnabar an' buys two automobiles—one for her an' one for him an' does all he can in reason to make the damn squaw happy. He tells me as how he gives her five hundred dollars a month pin-money—yes, sir, governor, that's what he calls it—pin-money! An' at that she's hollerin' night an' day for more.

"Governor, she's a wild mustang, an' she ain't never goin' to be broke to trot double, although at that I reckon she can't help her natur'. All o' them mixed breeds 'ceptin' one or two, is that way, an' I ain't blamin' her so much as I'm blamin' Billy Boy for marryin' her. I told him how it'd end up, an' it did just as I said. They ain't been wedded more'n a year before

she's rollin' 'em high in Cinnabar, an' I'm a-tellin' you, governor, it takes somethin' to shock Cinnabar in them days. She's on the edge o' disgracin' Billy Boy time an' ag'in, but he loves her an' forgives her, an' she 'lows she'll behave—till next time! An' finally one day Billy Boy hears as how Cinnabar is a-linkin' her name with the county assessor, who's a good-lookin', popular young feller with all them airs an' graces an' a way o' wearin' his clothes which Billy Boy's clean out of, if he ever had 'em, which I doubt. So Billy Boy calls on this county assessor an' warns him off the reservation or if he will persist in comin', to come a-smokin'; an' after that Billy Boy has peace for mebbe two months an' begins to get his bearin's again.

"Now, Bill, he ain't no shucks on handwritin', an' after he gets married he has his wife draw up all the checks to pay the house bills an' he just signs 'em without investigation. He's trustful that-a-way, an' the consequence is one bright day, when he's about to light out for Round Mountain, where he's got some placer interests he figgers on buyin' mebbe, his wife ups an' says she's just got to have some more pin-money. Well, he's in a hurry to get away, so he grabs a pen an' signs a check in blank, an' the dust o' his leavin' ain't settled yet out in Big Smoky before that female is down to the bank an' drawed out every cent Bill has on deposit.

"She takes twenty-two thousand odd dollars in currency, an' an hour later her an' the county assessor is in her automobile headed for Battle Mountain to catch the Overland for the East. An' in order to avoid meetin' people they don't foller the regular trail through Big Smoky, but just head right across country.

"Well, governor, Billy Boy ain't in Round Mountain an hour till he finds it ain't goin' to be possible for him

to do business, so he changes his mind about stayin' over to investigate the claims an' heads right back to Cinnabar, which Cinnabar is a good fifty mile away, straight across Big Smoky. Havin' allers been used to takin' short cuts across country with the burros Billy Boy continues the practice when he's got an automobile, an' when he's about half-way home an' a-crackin' right along, breakin' trail through the sage, who does he meet up with but the county assessor an' the squaw a-tinkerin' with their car, which the same has broke down.

"It's a right embarrassin' meetin', because since he's been livin' in town Billy Boy, which he's as peaceful as a spring lamb, don't tote no gun. But the county assessor has one o' these little five-shot, short-barreled, no-account pocket pistols that'll hold up to about ten feet, an' the minute he sees Billy Boy comin' he knows what to expect, so he pulls an' gits to work. Billy Boy jumps out of his car an' comes right for him, which excites the county assessor so he plumb misses all five shots, an' then Billy Boy works him over some, throws him, ties his hands behind him an' sets down on the runnin' board to think of a lot o' things, an' among 'em the check he signed in blank. So he looks his missus over but she's busted, an' then he frisks the county assessor an' finds the roll, which he hypothecates an' otherwise retains for his own use an' benefit. Then him an' his missus has it out hot an' heavy, an' she tells him plain she only married him for his money, that she loves the county assessor an' aims to have him some day, come hell or high water.

"'Well,' Billy Boy says to her, 'it's mos' certainly hard on me to hold my temper when a man runs away with my wife, but when he adds insult to injury by skedaddlin' on my money I sure rise an' protest.'

"'Tain't your money,' she says, 'it's his.'

"'I'll see,' says Billy Boy, an' he yokes the county assessor to the tail of his automobile with a towin' rope. 'Git in!' he says to his wife, an' she gets in an' Billy Boy starts. He's run the county assessor mebbe a quarter of a mile an' drug him mebbe fifty feet before he stops.

"'Where'd you git all that money?' Billy Boy says; an' the assessor says: 'Your wife give it to me to hold.'

"'That's all I wanted to know,' says Billy Boy. 'If she'd give it to me to hold an' you'd asked me whose money it was, I'd have let you drag me to death but I wouldn't have told.' So he casts the county assessor loose in the heart o' Big Smoky. 'I ain't goin' to kill you,' he says, 'because that'd make a scandal for my wife, but, as the feller says, the Lord will pervide, an' mebbe he'll pervide for you, although I doubt it. You're such a hand at runnin',' he says, 'suppose you see how long it'll take you to git to water. It's twenty-five mile to Round Mountain an' water, an' if you make it lemme know an' I'll git a divorce an' let you have this woman.' An' then he throws his wife into his automobile an' starts for Cinnabar, with the county assessor a-beggin' an' a-pleadin' to be took in. But Billy Boy drives away half a mile an' waits, an' pretty soon the county assessor starts off back-trackin' Billy Boy's trail for Round Mountain.

"'I reckon you ain't a-goin' to get that feller,' says Billy Boy to his wife. 'The coyotes got a prior-entry claim on his carcass,' an' away he dusts for Cinnabar. Now it don't occur to Billy Boy that his wife's a-goin' to say anything about this deal, but he don't know her a little bit. She's got Injun blood in her an' she don't stop at nothin'. She's no sooner in town than she telephones the sheriff the whole story, an' a searchin' party starts out for the county assessor.

"Naturally they don't find him, although they can follow the trail o' Billy Boy's car easy enough. The trouble is the county assessor gits delirious an' leaves the trail, an' when they find him it's the buzzards that p'int him out.

"Well, sir, if the district attorney don't organize the Grand Jury an' have Billy Boy arrested for murder! Billy Boy pleads justifiable homicide an' says he ain't got no call to carry three in a two-seated automobile. If some folks wants to be Christians an' return good for evil he ain't objectin', but that ain't his style. He claims as how he left the decision up to the Almighty.

"But he can't produce the gun, havin' left it out in Big Smoky where the wind buries it in the sand; in addition to which his wife takes the stand an' says there wasn't no shootin' at all. An' when Billy Boy's lawyers asks her: 'How about that check you cashed in?' she says: 'Sure, I cashed it. Billy was in a hurry to leave to go over to Round Mountain an' buy a placer mine, an' he couldn't wait for the bank to open, so he give me the check an' told me to foller in my car with the money.' An' that poor dear county assessor, as fine a gentleman as ever lived, he jus' wouldn't think o' lettin' her tackle Big Smoky alone, so he goes with her, an' they meet Billy Boy comin' back an' she gives him the money, an' then the big blow-off takes place.

"Of course the sheriff finds the money on Billy Boy when he arrests him that day, an' when that woman gits up in the jury box an' cries an' says her husband is a inhuman brute an' she won't protect him nohow, the jury agrees with her. As the foreman says when deliverin' the verdict, if he'd shot the assessor they'd have landed him for plain manslaughter, but a-turnin' him loose to die was plumb fiendish—an' they bring in a verdict o' murder in the first degree."

Toyabe Tom finished his recital with a dramatic wave of his grimy paw.

"But that doesn't square you, sheriff. Three weeks ago you started from Cinnabar to deliver this prisoner. You ran away with him and then you changed your mind. How about that?"

"Well, I might as well own up," Toyabe admitted, after fully half a minute spent in a critical examination of the floor, the four walls and the ceiling. "I was crooked—that is, I wasn't crooked, but I intended to be. You see, governor, me an' Billy Boy was pardners, an' I made up my mind he wasn't goin' to be hung no-how, only I never figgered none whatever on Billy Boy's p'int o' view. After we're on the train awhile I says: 'Son, when we get to Reno I'm a-goin' to have a cinder in each eye.'

"'You can't,' he says. 'This here's an oil-burnin' locomotive.'

"'Then,' I says, 'I'm a-goin' to be took sudden with cataracts, an' you git. An', I says, 'here's somethin' to git on,' an' I slip him fifteen hundred dollars.

"'Toyabe,' he says, 'this is about what I'd expect o' you an' I'm mos' almighty grateful, Ol'-Timer, but the fact is you held up your paw an' took an oath of office an' you've got to keep it. The citizens o' Cinnabar is a-trustin' you to bring me to Carson City to be hung, an' you got to do it. I'd sure hate to think o' you a-skulkin' an' a-dodgin' from hones' men, just on account o' me settin' in the game o' life an' a-tryin' to draw to a bobtail flush.'

"'Billy Boy,' I says, 'you're jus' a-dreamin'.'

"'I know,' he says, 'but I'll hurt the man that wakes me up. Now listen: This trial cleaned out my Cinnabar holdings, but I'm too old a prospector to put all my water on one jack. The first thing you taught me was

to carry a full canteen, an' then if the jacks stamped I'd have an ace coppered. I got a hundred thousand in a Reno bank, an' my wife don't know I got it, which if she did she'd have an injunction out agin me withdrawin' it. As my widder she figgers to come into half o' my estate, win, lose or draw, an' that's what was a-botherin' me. I wanted to see you an' give you the money, so I could die without leavin' an estate. What little she's got her claws on now the lawyers'll take away from her, becuz I've left a strong will to fight.'

" 'Billy Boy,' I says, 'let's take that money an' go to South America or Alaska, an' I'll go with you, so there won't be no skulkin' or dodgin'.' But, Lord bless you, governor, he just laughs at me.

" 'Why, Ol'-Timer,' he says, 'what'd you do when you heard the desert callin'? Don't talk nonsense, Toyabe. Me, I'd just as lief swing as live in a furrin' country, so shet up.'

" 'Never mind me,' I says, 'I ain't sentenced to get hung.'

" 'Don't persist,' he says. 'You're thinkin' so much o' me you've plumb forgot to think of yourself, so I s'pose I'll have to keep right on doin' your thinkin' for you, same as I allers did, clear up to the mornin' o' the twenty-eighth, you blessed ol' tumblin' bug, you!'

" 'So what could I do, warden?' Toyabe concluded. His auditor nodded and glanced furtively at the warden, who appeared to be completely crushed.

" 'And where have you been hiding for the past three weeks?' the "governor" asked.

" 'Ain't been hidin' nowhere, governor. The play comes up this way: Me an' Billy Boy gets off the train at Hazen an' scoffs in the eatin' house, an' on our way back to the train I spot two prospectors an' their outfit comin' into town. They line up at a waterin' trough

outside a saloon an' drink, but the prospectors don't go inside, so from that I know they're busted an' I get an idee. Governor, 'tain't no time till I've bought the outfit just as she stands, them two prospectors has clumb aboard the train an' the train's pulled out, leavin' me an' Billy Boy in Hazen. Then I go over to the general store an' buy some prospectin' duds, an' come dark I retire to the town limits an' shed my store clothes. Then I go back to another general store an' buy some prospectin' duds for Billy Boy, an' Billy Boy he retires and sheds his store clothes, an' then we bring the jacks up to the first general store an' Billy Boy buys a lot o' grub, an' some rolled barley, an' we fill the water kegs an' canteens an' drift. We're a week gettin' to Reno, where Billy Boy's still obstinate, although I been exhortin' him mos' powerful all the way, an' at Reno we go to Billy Boy's safe-deposit box an' get the money an' put it out at interest on United States bonds, which Billy Boy locks up in another safe-deposit box he makes me rent, an' then we have a drink or two together an' take in the sights an' pull out for Carson. We been browsin, along, takin' it easy—an'—well, we're here, an' you got to admit we got here on time."

"But the state has been combed from end to end for you two."

"Couldn't have combed very hard, governor, because we ain't been hidin'."

"But what made you do such a crazy thing, sheriff? Don't you know the Cinnabar County Commissioners have declared your office vacant and appointed your successor? And don't you know there's a warrant out for your arrest?"

"What for, governor?"

"Why, for being false to your oath of office—"

"Sho, sho!" Toyabe chuckled; "I've surrendered

Billy Boy, ain't I? An' there ain't nothin' in the statute books prohibitin' a sheriff from dawdlin' along the road on his way to prison with his pardner, is there?"

The warden roused from his despair long enough to laugh at this. "But you've lost a good job, sheriff," he warned the old desert rat.

But Toyabe Tom shook his head. "No, I didn't," he protested. "I'd have quit anyhow as soon as Billy Boy was gone. I couldn't bear to go back to Cinnabar ag'in an' him not there. I been used to a free range, governor, an' I can't take no pleasure in a job around a jail. When I see Billy Boy at the jail winder, like a bobcat in a cage, my heart mos' busts in two, an' right then an' there I make up my mind that once I git him out o' jail he ain't never a-goin' back. An' you know, governor, that if I'd come here first off with Billy Boy, the warden—not meanin' no offense, warden—would have locked the boy up in the death cell an' put a guard over him, like a coyote watchin' beside a gopher hole, an' poor Billy Boy, well, he'd have died forty deaths before you stretched him. That boy's just got to have fresh air."

"I bet he has," the other replied enthusiastically. "Suppose you go down to the gate and bring Billy Boy up. I'd like to meet that young man. As you say, he is possessed of a totally unnecessary number of—er—I don't like the word, but it's singularly expressive."

Toyabe Tom needed no second bidding. He was off as fast as his old gnarled legs could carry him.

"Well," the warden queried the instant the door closed behind him, "how do you like the prospect? That's the real Sheriff Jennings of Cinnabar, and, by all the gods, he's left his prisoner down at the gate to guard the jacks!"

His friend reached for the warden's telephone. "Well," he said musingly, "this old sheriff isn't the only real official in these parts. Thank God, I *AM* the governor of Nevada, and God forbid that I should let that Billy Boy hang in the sacred name of Justice—Hello. . . . Get me the governor's secretary, please. . . . What I say goes, and if it fails to go in this case I'll find a way to— . . . Hello, state house? That you, Ross? This is the governor. Take this letter, please. Ready? This is to certify that William King, of Cinnabar County, Nevada, condemned to hang for first degree murder between sunrise and sunset of the twenty-eighth day of October, 191— has this day been pardoned by me, and given back to his old Tom-partner. Given under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of Nevada this twenty-seventh day of October, etc. Leave a space for my name, Ross, clamp the Great Seal on, smear it up real fancy with sealing wax and a strip of blue ribbon, and put it on the gubernatorial stationery with a fancy backing. I'll give you just five minutes to get that ready, Ross, and then you take my automobile and bust all the speed laws in the state getting down to the warden's office at the penitentiary. If you're a minute later I'll fire you."

He hung up and grinned at the warden. "Happiest day of my life," he declared. "After all, the office is worth something, isn't it?—Warden, for heaven's sake, sign that receipt. You got me into this, and you've cost me the Cinnabar vote when I run again, but I've made good. Now you do likewise."

The door opened and in came Toyabe dragging Billy Boy by the arm.

"This is Billy Boy!" he shouted.

"Billy Boy," said the governor, "you're as free as any jack-rabbit in this great sage-brush commonwealth.

Toyabe, Old-Timer, I've just telephoned the capitol, and as luck would have it they hadn't locked up the Great Seal, and my secretary will be here in ten minutes with a temporary pardon for you. I'll make it official in a day or two. Shake, Billy Boy."

This was too much. Human nature could stand no more, and Toyabe Tom Jennings had reached in one day the limit of human joy, as he had plumbed in one day the limit of human misery. Out came his old .45 gun.

"Yahoo!" he howled with a magnificent catamount effect. Bang! And a shower of plaster fell on the warden's desk as a bullet plowed through the ceiling. "Yahoo!" Bang! Six separate and distinct yahoos and bangs.

"Let joy be unconfined!" the warden shouted. "The state pays for the ceiling!" And he pulled his gun and yelled and banged away.

"A gun! A gun! Somebody give me a gun!" the governor shrieked, and ten seconds later the captain of the yard burst into the room with a gun in each hand. He had arrived to quell the wholesale murder and general jail delivery that instinct told him was being perpetrated. As he paused thunderstruck at the tableau, the governor approached, smiling.

"Thank you, captain," he said. "You heard me asking for one, didn't you?" and he took possession quite forcibly of one of the captain's guns. Before they knew it Billy Boy had the other.

"Yahoo!" yowled the governor. Bang!

"Yahoo!" yowled Billy Boy. Bang!

An hour later, when they parted at the prison gate, the governor drew Toyabe aside. "Toyabe," he said, "what are your plans?"

"Well," Toyabe answered after slight reflection, "I did aim, if you an' the warden won't say nothin', to go back to Cinnabar an' collect that thousand dollars reward on Billy Boy, dead or alive."

A Motion to Adjourn

PSYCHOLOGIST and divine will tell you that all men are endowed with a capacity to rise to sublime heights of virtue or sink to abysmal depths of general cussedness. Lafe Darby chose to exercise the latter of these two natural faculties.

The medical fraternity, adding its boresome mite to the lore of science, gravely informs us that the prolongation of human life depends upon certain functions of metabolism and nutrition; these latter demanding in relative proportion certain fats, proteids and carbohydrates colloquially designated as grub. Though there is no doubt that the doctors are right in the premises there is, nevertheless, an exception to every rule, and if you search diligently you are bound to find it. The exception to this particular rule might have been found in Kelcey's Wells in the person of Lafe Darby.

With Mr. Darby grub was a secondary consideration. What he desired, required, and to a certain extent acquired was very powerful whisky of a blend known in the parlance of Kelcey's Wells as "rattle-snake juice."

We say "to a certain extent." This qualifying phrase is inserted for the reason that all the fire-water in the world would have been deemed by Lafe as insufficient for his needs. In the absence of unlimited capital his source of supply was limited to the bartender's mistakes at the Stagger Inn and the straight goods purchased outright from the earnings of his patient, in-

dustrious, and very much better half, the proprietress of a laundry in which handwork was a specialty.

For, in addition to his distinction as the town drunkard of Kelcey's Wells, Lafe was an ultra-feminist. He believed not only in the equality of woman in the field of human endeavor, but in her superiority, carried to the logical conclusion of the complete elimination of the male from the realm of labor. Harboring as he did such radical sentiments, it followed, therefore, that whenever manual labor or any synonym for the same was suggested in his immediate vicinity Lafe Darby promptly became a disinterested spectator. Work was as repulsive to him as an "r" to a professional Southerner.

As for water, Mr. Darby regarded that uninteresting fluid as a chemical formula. It was H_2O to him—a generally colorless, tasteless, odorless liquid designed by nature to flow under bridges, used by women for the laundering of clothes, by children for the Saturday night bath, and by tenderfeet as a "chaser" for the liquor of grown men.

Kelcey's Wells was an ideal habitat for one with Lafe Darby's aversion to the fluid that neither cheers nor inebriates. In any direction other than the perpendicular it was sixty miles to water—sixty miles of brown, burned, aching desert desolation, where a man must know his landmarks and keep well within the limits of his physical endurance, beware the heat that enervates and the alkaline dust that dries the lungs and burns the eyes, until one walks in an ever-narrowing circle, and chokes and curses and weeps and prays and at last lies down and holds his peace forever.

At the time Lafe Darby ceased drinking—in fact for some two years previous—Kelcey's Wells was at that ultimate state of mining-camp desuetude known as

"quiet." Mining camps with a glorious past never die while one of the original boosters remains on the ground to challenge libel. You meet such a citizen and you say to him: "Well, Bill, how are things over in Eden?" You know the camp is considered absolutely "dead"—in fact, it has been so considered for several years; but Bill—may his tribe increase!—will answer cheerfully: "Wa-ll, Eden's a little bit quiet right now." Thus, without detracting from his reputation for veracity, he manages to create the impression that until about ten days previous Eden was the hub of the universe.

Kelcey's Wells had such a citizen in the person of Dr. Samuel Bleeker. The worthy doctor had arrived on the crest of the mining-boom wave that swept the usual assortment of big men, little men, beggar-men, and thieves into Kelcey's Wells—the floating population that comes with the boom and with the boom departs. The boom in Kelcey's Wells had tarried briefly, in conformity with custom, and had passed on to Toquina City, leaving a row of drab tent houses and false-fronted pine shanties clutching the hillside and straggling down the gulch, as if they, too, had heard the call to other and more virgin fields and fain would follow.

Midway of Kelcey's Wells ran Mizpah Avenue; midway of Mizpah Avenue the Stagger Inn, bravest of all the haunts of Terpsichore and Bacchus, still held forth, hopeful of a return engagement of the olden, golden godless days; and midway of the long bar of the Stagger Inn one might be reasonably certain of finding Lafe Darby, his right foot on the brass foot-rail, his right hand clasping his favorite brand of nutriment. Behind the bar one might also have observed a snappy, black-eyed, alert disciple of John Barleycorn, known in Kelcey's Wells as Jimmy the Cricket. Over alongside the wall, with his generous paunch bulging

into the concavity of a faro table, sat Faro Dan Simmons, awaiting any stray dollars that might roll his way; while at the end of the long room the Butterfly Kid, seemingly grafted to his craps table, fingered the dice whenever a customer entered and softly whistled Beethoven's Minuet in G whether he won or lost. When Doc Bleeker entered the Stagger Inn for his evenings' evening and found all of the hereinbefore-mentioned worthies in their appointed places, it was his inevitable custom to salute them thusly:

"Good evening, brothers." To which he would receive this reply: "Evenin', brother."

And thereby hangs a tale with a moral. Let us to it.

In a boom mining camp in the western desert the man with an imagination is a municipal asset, particularly if, in addition to his imagination, he is the possessor of a sense of humor, for sooner or later such an individual is bound to give birth to an idea that will make for the joy of living. In Kelcey's Wells and similar camps the man with a new, whimsical, innocent, crazy formula for extracting the deadly monotony from life will not lack disciples to promulgate his gospel, and it was even so in the case of that nameless genius who conceived the idea, away back in the boom days of Rhyolite, of organizing an uproarious fraternity known as the Ornery and Worthless Men of the World.

The O. & W. M. O. T. W. was the *ne plus ultra* of democracy. The dues and initiation fee were nominal; books, records, minutes, finances, regular meeting places, annual conventions, and so forth, were dispensed with, leaving the entire fraternal structure to rest upon a whimsical and wholly enjoyable ritual of local authorship and peculiarly suited to the sense of humor of the

average male citizen. In short, the Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World was merely an excuse for a "time." The charter members went forth into the highways and byways, signed up a sufficient number of acolytes, initiated them, and forthwith spent all moneys realized from the initiation fees and first year's dues in goodly food and drink. Once a man became a member, forthwith he had earned the right to proselyte on his own account, cheered by the knowledge that the succeeding class of initiates must pay for his pleasure.

Doc Bleeker had taken a trip to Rhyolite on some little matter of gallstones in the Wonder King mine, had been promptly seized upon and initiated even unto the seventy-eighth degree, and had returned across the desert to Kelcey's Wells with the germ of a brilliant idea already stirring to life in his fraternal being.

Why not (Doc soliloquized) seize upon this whimsy of the Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World, incorporate it, and make of it a real secret society peculiar to the desert; a benevolent and fraternal organization, with all the ponderous machinery of such, including hand-grips, passwords, distress signals, distress words, grand hailing sign, an emblem for the lapel, sick benefits, funeral fund, and a uniformed drill corps! Why not, indeed! Such a society, with a membership safeguarded by the most stringent by-laws limiting association in the order to bona-fide desert dwellers, would do much to cement a broad bond of charity, loyalty, and fraternity throughout the sovereign state of Nevada.

The Doc was a natural joiner. His was that cheerful, simple, honest nature that finds in a lodge meeting the greatest pleasure in life. He would join anything joinable, provided it was respectable. Once a month he would motor eighty miles to Goldfield to attend a meeting of the Masonic lodge there, and on the way back

he would stop over in Yerington to look in on the Knights of Pythias. For fully twenty-five years he had been engaged continuously in a mysterious operation known as "going through the chairs," and was the possessor of numerous gold badges studded with chip diamonds to prove that he had negotiated many of these difficult courses successfully.

He knew everybody—and loved them. If he met a stranger wearing an emblem of one of his many lodges, forthwith the worthy fellow would give the grand hailing signal and exchange cards. By this means he came in time to know many horse thieves. In his coat lapel he wore the Hello-Bill button with the clock that has stopped at eleven o'clock, and any time that fateful hour struck with Doc Bleeker in the Stagger Inn, silently he drank a toast to the departed brethren. He belonged to the Moose, the Owls, the Red Men, the Foresters, the Masons, the Native Sons of the Golden West, the Odd Fellows, the Eagles, and a dozen other fraternities. His dues and fraternal insurance premiums kept him poor; his kindly person was a perfect arsenal of teeth, claws, horns, and kindred evidences of departed animal life.

In his professional capacity Doc Bleeker was always giving special rates to his fraternal brethren; hence he had a tremendous practice, to fully half of which he never presented a bill and from the other half of which he managed by great industry to collect sufficient to enable him to keep pace with his assorted fraternal incubi. On the whole he was the best-loved man in Kelcey's Wells, because he was absolutely truthful in all things, unselfish and generous in his service, and possessed withal that vast underlying sympathy which is a physician's greatest asset. He was never so unhappy as when he lost a patient, and never so happy as when,

in lodge assembled, he drew up sonorous resolutions of sympathy for presentation to the widow of a departed brother.

There are hundreds of thousands of people like Doc Bleeker. Without them fraternity, loyalty, and charity would be at a low ebb and books on our vanishing wild life would have no sale to speak of.

The longer Doc Bleeker considered the idea of organizing a secret society all his own, the more feasible and dazzling did the proposition appear. Also, since he was brother to all men, it happened that in the simplicity of his nature he took the matter up one dull day in the Stagger Inn when the only persons present were Lafe Darby, Jimmy the Cricket, Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid. The quartet listened respectfully, and their approving silence spurring the doctor on to greater flights of oratory and ambition, the latter finally concluded a glowing verbal prospectus with this remark:

"Gentlemen, what's the matter with incorporating Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World? There are five of us present—just sufficient for purposes of incorporation. I'll write the ritual, the by-laws, and the constitution myself!"

The Butterfly Kid looked at Faro Dan, both looked at Lafe Darby, Lafe looked at Jimmy the Cricket, and Jimmy the Cricket set out five glasses.

"By common consent it's a go," said Faro Dan. "And," he added humorously, "barrin' yourself, Doc, I don't know where you could find four more ornery or wuthless men than me an' the Butterfly an' Lafe here an' the Cricket."

"What'll be the initiation?" Lafe Darby queried anxiously. He was desirous of joining but feared a prohibitive tariff.

"Whatever it is I'll pay it for you, Lafe," the But-

terfly Kid assured him. "You're too doggone ornery and worthless, you sot, not to sit in this game. You'll add a heap o' tone to the order."

Doc Bleeker downed his customary refreshment—a thimbleful of brandy of a quality not elsewhere obtainable in Kelcey's Wells and imported by Jimmy the Cricket for the medico's exclusive use—and rushed off to his office, there to batter out laboriously with one finger on his antiquated typewriter the Articles of Incorporation and a constitution and by-laws for Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World. He culled liberally from his unlimited source of supply of the literature of other orders, fixed the initiation fee at twenty-five dollars and the monthly dues at two dollars and fifty cents, with sick benefits of twenty-five dollars a week and death benefits of two hundred and fifty dollars to the next of kin of the deceased brother, payable immediately upon proof of death, said proof to be satisfactory to the order.

For two days he neglected his practice while he toiled at this labor of love, after which he had a public stenographer put it into shape and called a preliminary meeting in the back room of the Stagger Inn. Here the five incorporators signed the articles of incorporation—there was no capital stock—put the seal of their approval on the by-laws and constitution, levied an assessment of twenty-five dollars each, and sent the articles of incorporation, together with Doc Bleeker's check for the corporation tax, to the secretary of state at Carson City. Then, while awaiting the receipt of their charter, they returned to their individual vocations.

The boom tide was at the flood in Kelcey's Wells when that charter arrived. Doc Bleeker had some "literature" ready and he, Faro Dan, the Butterfly Kid, and Jimmy the Cricket let no guilty man escape.

The idea was voted a winner, but not, we grieve to say on its merits. To the mercurial public of Kelcey's Wells there was something attractive in a lodge of Ornery and Worthless Men of the World. The name itself interested them, for the desert is the natural home of whimsical nomenclature that delights in paradox and irony; but what really charmed the citizenry was the personality of the five charter members. Consider these worthies for a brief paragraph:

Doc Bleeker has already been explained. Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid were honest gamblers. Beyond the pale they were, but "on the square." And who, may be asked, ever met a "square" gambler that didn't, under the acid, assay more pure gold to the ounce than all the smug guardians of a brother's morals that ever decried the Goddess of Chance? Echoes answer, "Nobody." A square gambler off duty is usually the gentlest, kindest, most charitable institution in life, and quite generally he belongs to that lodge whose motto is "charity without ostentation"; quite generally still he is one of the few members to conform to the motto! As for Jimmy the Cricket, he was a bartender and knew himself for a nobody; wherefore he desired to be somebody and fixed his longing gaze on the regalia of Senior Warden! Lafe Darby, headed downhill for the Gates of Oblivion, did not, in his own classical language, care a damn, but it did please Lafe and his fellow incorporators to reflect that in lodge at least they were the equals of all men!

To see these worthies, with all the assurance of a quintet of deacons, organizing and operating a secret society conceived in charity, loyalty and fraternity, tickled the sense of humor of Kelcey's Wells. Kelcey's Wells was making its money fast and easy—money is round and made to roll, and it was said that Faro Dan

as Worthy Chaplain of the Ornery and Worthless Men of the World alone was worth the price of admission. Ergo, Kelcey's Wells, desiring diversion, laughed, paid its money cheerfully and took a chance.

Within six months Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, O. & W. M. O. T. W., had a membership of one thousand—a membership that included mine owners, prospectors, gamblers, barkeepers, millionaires for a day, swampers, dance-hall proprietors, mining engineers, bankers, brokers and bookkeepers. The slogan of the order was charity, loyalty and fraternity, and it required thirteen blackballs to deny an applicant membership. Nobody was ever blackballed.

They made Lafe Darby Junior Warden and stationed him in the anteroom to receive the countersign on lodge nights. There was some discussion as to the wisdom of this course, but Doc Bleeker said it might put some backbone into Lafe should he be given a position of trust and honor, particularly since the appointment carried with it Lafe's pledge not to get drunk on Thursdays, in order that he might not appear to disgrace the order on lodge nights. The Doc argued that by starting Lafe in at the lowest rung of the ladder that way and treating him as a human being, the lost one might be fired with an ambition to go through the chairs, and since sobriety and decency must go hand in hand with such a vaunting love of glory, eventually the Ornery and Worthless Men might justify their existence by snatching this alcohol-soaked brand from spontaneous combustion.

After receiving a brother in the anteroom on lodge nights it was Lafe's duty to lift a little wicket in the lodge-room door and whisper hoarsely to the Senior Warden—otherwise Jimmy the Cricket: "Brother So-an-So, with [or without] the pass-word!"

Quite naturally these two offices fell to Lafe and the Cricket (it being thought best to couple them in the betting as it were), for when Lafe's alcoholic breath came wheezing through the wicket when announcing a brother it had no effect on the Senior Warden, whom much experience had rendered immune to that sort of thing.

The Butterfly Kid was the organist. He could play the piano passing well, in consequence of which the organ held no terrors for him. What he did not know he faked. Faro Dan was the Worthy Chaplain, opening and closing the lodge with prayer. A Cornish shift boss from the Big Princess was the Grand Marshal, a consumptive telegraph operator named Slim William was financial secretary, for the reason that the position carried a salary of twenty-five dollars a month and Slim William needed the money. Moreover, according to Doc Bleeker, he wasn't going to last very long anyway. Billy Cathcart, cashier of the First Bank and Trust Company, was Worthy Senior Potentate, a fly-by-night stockbroker was the Worthy Junior Potentate, and Doc Bleeker, lovingly alluded to as the Father of the Order, was Worthy Supreme Potentate.

At the first meeting of the order one hundred Ornerly and Worthless Men presented themselves for initiation. The real initiation was a solemn and a holy thing, as conducted by Doc Bleeker; but when the candidates were turned over to the Committee on Side Degrees, with the big Cornish shift boss as master of ceremonies, a new and vital interest was immediately aroused.

That was a true philosopher who stated that a new broom sweeps clean, even though he did expound the obvious. The new order was a success from the beginning. It was a new note in life, and since man is naturally an adventurous animal it followed that within

three months Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, O. & W. M. O. T. W., had a membership of five hundred, at which point Doc Bleeker, as foxy an organizer as ever lived, closed the roll of charter members and raised the initiation fee to fifty dollars.

Now, in the desert, as elsewhere, man is human. Probably more so. He buys on the principle that if it comes high it might be good. If he is denied the privilege of buying, the denial merely serves to stimulate his desire for possession. Doc Bleeker organized a whirlwind membership campaign, rented the opera house, and held a monster initiation of two hundred and thirty-seven candidates. It was an open meeting, to which the ladies of the camp were invited and permitted to glimpse all of that portion of the ritual not sacredly secret. After the ceremonies a dance followed, and after the dance there was a midnight supper at the Palace Hotel—price five dollars per couple.

In accordance with a decree issued by the Worthy Supreme Potentate all of the officers wore formal evening clothes, and that was the knockout blow. What if Faro Dan, the Butterfly Kid, Jimmy the Cricket, and Lafe Darby had never worn such habiliments in all their adventurous lives? Nothing! Doc Bleeker had a local tailor measure them and send those measurements to a rental parlor in Reno, which did the rest.

Lafe Darby was so proud of himself he stayed sober practically all of Wednesday and took only half a dozen drinks on Thursday. In this unaccustomed mental state he remembered he had a wife, and suggested that she abandon her tubs early on Thursday and come up to the opera house to see him in his "dress suit" and his new regalia of Junior Warden. When the poor, worn little creature saw Lafe that night, her broken heart fluttered with something of the old girlish thrill that

had been hers in the days when she had first met Lafe, a joyous follower of boom camps and not yet claimed by the bottle imp. Doc Bleeker found her crying for joy in the alley outside the stage door, whither she had retreated to be alone with her ecstasy, so he hunted up Lafe and gave him five dollars together with orders, under pain of expulsion from his office as Junior Warden, to take his wife down to the Palace Hotel for supper, following the free dance after the initiation.

Doc Bleeker knew that anything the women approve is predestined to success, and the master stroke of diplomacy recorded above put the seal of social approval on Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornerly & Worthless Men of the World. After that night, if you didn't belong to the O. & W. M. O. T. W. you were a nobody. It was a sign of social degeneracy.

To Doc Bleeker's credit be it recorded that his strenuous efforts to establish the order were not founded on a selfish desire to enlarge his acquaintance and consequently his practice. He was actuated solely by a desire to express his unusual accumulation of good feeling toward his fellow man and gratify that soft streak in his nature that had ordained him from birth a natural joiner.

The Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World, Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, had accumulated, therefore, approximately a thousand enthusiastic members and twenty-five thousand dollars in cash along in the autumn of 1907, and there was some talk of erecting a building on Mizpah Avenue. The Building Committee recommended a four-story stone building, to cost approximately two hundred thousand dollars, to be paid for by bonds sold to members. There were to be lodge rooms for rent to other societies on the fourth and third floors, club rooms for the Ornerly and Worthless Men

on the second, and a department store on the ground floor.

For some weeks, however, there had been disquieting telegraphic reports from Wall Street, and the local stock exchange had slowly been taking on the appearance of a mortuary. Men talked in large figures as before, but to Doc Bleeker, a fairly keen student of human nature, their talk seemed to lack some of its former enthusiasm.

Doc's first hint of panic came when he called on his lodge brother, Billy Cathcart, the cashier of the First Bank and Trust Company of Kelcey's Wells, for a five-hundred-dollar loan to meet a note on an automobile he was purchasing on the instalment plan. To his surprise and grief his request was declined, with the statement that money was very tight and the bank was making no loans.

Forthwith Doc Bleeker had an inspiration. If his friend the cashier, who was also Worthy Senior Potentate of the O. & W. M. O. T. W., and, therefore, a brother, declined the loan, something must indeed be wrong, and it was characteristic of him in that moment to think, not of his automobile, but of the funds of his order. He leaned across the cashier's desk, transfixing Cathcart with his index finger.

"Billy," he said impressively, "on your honor as an Ornerly and Worthless Man of the World, are the lodge funds absolutely safe in this bank? I know you don't own stock in it, Billy, so if you tell me the money is safe I'll believe you."

"Doc," said the cashier miserably, remembering his oath as an Ornerly and Worthless Man of the World, "I'm a dummy director. I've got one share of stock."

"Thank you, Billy: I knew I could depend on you," the doctor answered, and forthwith hunted up Slim

William, the financial secretary, to whom he issued orders to draw a check to Cash for all of the funds of the order on deposit in the local bank. Since Slim William's salaried position as financial secretary and the prolongation of his life as an individual depended upon Doc Bleeker's sufferance, he drew the check without question and signed it. Then Doc signed it as Worthy Supreme Potentate and took it round to the Stagger Inn for the signature of Faro Dan, who, being a square gambler, had by common consent been elected to the office of treasurer. Faro Dan was a blessed individual. He never asked questions. He signed, without even reading the amount of the check, and Doc Bleeker took the check to the bank, withdrew the funds in shining twenty-dollar gold pieces, carried them across to the express office, expressed them to San Francisco and followed on the same train. In San Francisco he cached the coin in a huge safe-deposit box, returning to the locus of his labors in Kelcey's Wells in time to discover that life is indeed filled with quite a number of things. To begin, the panic had arrived, and the First Bank and Trust Company was in charge of a representative of the state bank examiner, who stated that, owing to the number of loans made on lithographed paper of little or doubtful value, the bank might possibly pay ten cents on the dollar. Whereupon Doc shook hands with himself until he discovered that his automobile had been replevined for failure to meet his note. Simultaneously the ore bodies in the Big Princess petered out, a San Francisco paper house attached the press and the gas engine of the local palladium of liberty, and black pneumonia appeared in the camp; then the outward hegira commenced and all was over!

The suppression of the Kelcey's Wells Argus was a distinct blow to Doc Bleeker, inasmuch as it deprived

him of the opportunity for informing the Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World that the funds of the order were safe. He had planned a front-page story that would have made him the idol of all Ornerly and Worthless Men, and the lack of opportunity irked him sore.

Accordingly he sought the recording secretary, who presided over the membership records, being minded to suggest to that functionary the advisability of a circular letter notifying the brothers of the ability of the Ornerly and Worthless Men to weather the storm.

Alas! the recording secretary, late timekeeper on the day shift of the Big Princess, having seen the handwriting on the wall, had emigrated. Interest in his own affairs had been paramount, so he merely turned over his records to Slim William and departed, no man could say where.

"Maybe Slim William can give me the names from his ledger accounts," the doctor thought, and forthwith turned his steps toward Slim William's lonely tent house on the outskirts of the town.

He found Slim William dying and delirious.

"Slim William," he called into the deaf ears, "what have you done with the records of the lodge?"

Slim William opened his big blue eyes and gazed at the doctor solemnly.

"Worthy Supreme Potentate," he gasped, "the recording—secretary left. I—got a—another one—of—those—damned—hemorrhages—and I took—everything—to—to—ah, Doc, I'm dying. . . ."

For an hour Doc Bleeker labored to keep Slim William alive, to bring him out of his delirium for a period sufficient to enable him to relate what he had done with the books of the order. Eventually he thought he had succeeded, and once more he put the all-important ques-

tion. Slim William smiled, for he was about to leave the desert where tuberculosis had chained him, a poor prisoner of fate, for three years, and Doc bent to hear his answer:

"O Lord—we give Thee—thanks that—Thou hast permitted us—to assemble once—more in council—to pro-mul-gate the spirit—of charity—loyalty—and fraternity. As we go—hence, we beseech Thee—O Lord—to—guide—our—erring—footsteps—in the paths—of righteousness. Grant—us—O Lord—in the end—a haven of rest—in green fields, where—lulled to sleep—by running water and—the drowsy drone of—bees—we shall await in—the heavenly chapter—on high—re-union with our brethren—of Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1—Order—of—Ornery—and—Worthless—"

He was repeating the closing prayer of the Worthy Chaplain, Faro Dan!

When Slim William was gone Doc Bleeker searched his poor shack, but found no trace of the lodge records. He would have liked to have had a public funeral for Slim William, with services in the opera house, had not his common sense indicated to him that such a funeral would be something of a social frost. Events of a dubious nature were happening too fast in Kelcey's Wells for the Ornery and Worthless Men to forget their own affairs long enough to fuss over Slim William, so Doc placed the late Worthy Financial Secretary in a light auto truck, and he and Faro Dan, the Butterfly Kid, Jimmy the Cricket, and Lafe Darby followed in a rented touring car.

Doc was a sentimental old chap. He insisted upon bumping Slim William over many miles of desert and mountain to a haven of rest in a green field down by the clover-laden banks of the Walker River. He had a quartet come down from Reno to meet the funeral

cortège, and they buried Slim William in style. They read the Ornery and Worthless Men's burial ritual over him, and Faro Dan rendered the invocation. They had some flowers. All realized that the expense was going to override the constitution and by-laws, but as the Butterfly Kid remarked sincerely, if a trifle profanely, "T'ell with that." They were not men who did things on the half-shell.

Upon his return from Slim William's funeral Doc Bleeker was summoned to the home of Lafe Darby. Mrs. Darby had presented Lafe with twins, and Lafe forthwith proceeded to drown the memory of this dual misfortune in strong drink and fought an inoffensive citizen. He was jailed for battery and vagrancy and cost the doctor ten dollars for a fine in the local law mill. Then measles came to assist black pneumonia in the eradication of Kelcey's Wells, and all in all Doc Bleeker was such a busy man for the succeeding three months that he was unable to attend a single meeting of the Ornery and Worthless Men. Since it seemed somewhat sacrilegious to convene without him, by common consent the weekly meetings were abandoned until matters should adjust themselves somewhat.

When eventually Doc Bleeker found time to turn from his professional and personal affairs and devote some attention to his fraternal duties his discoveries frightened him. The only records of the order extant were a carbon copy of the constitution and by-laws, which the worthy doctor discovered in his desk, and the articles of incorporation, which were on record in the archives of the secretary of state. Even the great seal was missing. They had to order a new one.

Now, Doc had been keeping to himself, for weak human purposes of self-aggrandizement, the news that the lodge funds were safe. He had looked fondly for-

ward to the day when he should find time to pass the word for a big rally of Ornery and Worthless Men and in a ringing speech tell them all. He had planned a banquet on the first anniversary of the installation of the order, but now that the membership records were lost he realized that a calamity had overtaken Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World.

However, he issued a verbal call for a meeting, and on a certain Thursday night the lodge met. Alas! the old reckless spirit of joyous abandon that characterizes the boom mining camp failed to respond to that call, for Kelcey's Wells had run its race. No longer was it the greatest boom camp on earth, but a little, sordid, neglected desert village, which with the passing of a few years would disintegrate and disappear entirely.

To anybody but an optimist like Doc Bleeker the sight of the dozen Ornery and Worthless Men who slouched into the hall that night merely to while away a dull evening would have been productive of at least a suspicion that the ancient law of the survival of the fittest was about to operate in the case of Kelcey's Wells. But Doc was a true Argonaut. He would not—could not—believe the blight was aught but a mere passing depression. He was long on Big Princess stock and believed that the lost lead would be found again. Hence, since the wish is ever father to the thought, Doc Bleeker believed, as all fanatics believe—because they believe!

"Things are a little quiet now, brothers," he explained after announcing the news that the funds of the order were intact and receiving as a reward a meager and unenthusiastic hand-clapping, "but they'll pick up in a little while and we'll begin hearing from the brothers again. This money flurry has frightened

a lot of weaklings, but the Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World are not easily frightened, and we shall save at least half our membership. When times begin to pick up a little we'll take a degree team over to Rhyolite and install another chapter."

But things did not pick up as the doctor prophesied. He inserted advertisements in the leading Nevada newspapers, advising all Ornerly and Worthless Men of Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1 of the miraculous salvation of the bank account; that owing to the panic six months' dues had been remitted, and that any wandering brother who would forward the pass-word by mail would, in the absence of the lodge records, be deemed a member in good standing and retained as such, provided he continued to forward his monthly dues.

Many of the brethren read this advertisement, but none replied to it. Kelcey's Wells was a pricked bubble, and now that they were removed from the atmosphere of hysteria that surrounds a boom camp they wondered how it had happened that they had ever been so foolish as to throw away twenty-five dollars for the privilege of being foolish! Pay their dues? It was to laugh! Throw more good money away after bad, and money, good or bad, as scarce as hair on a lizard? Not if they knew what they were doing—and they did. Moreover, fully half of those who read the doctor's advertisement had forgotten the countersign! A few could not afford the monthly dues, or the price of a journey to Kelcey's Wells for the purpose of campaigning for a reduction, while others declined to believe the doctor's tale of salvage and marveled that one ordinarily so decent and dependable should stoop to such a palpable bunco game wherewith to glean the price of transportation out of a dead camp.

While waiting for his advertising campaign to re-

unite the Ornery and Worthless Men, Doc Bleeker took heart of hope, reorganized the lodge, elected new officers and did a little proselyting—this latter, however, without success, for Kelcey's Wells was, in truth, "gone bust." But Doc couldn't seem to realize this. He merely complained that money was pretty tight and things pretty quiet, but they would pick up, see if they didn't.

Of course they didn't. Slowly but with deadly certainty the population of Kelcey's Wells continued to wane, taking its quota of Ornery and Worthless Men with each new hegira, until the chapter was reduced to the extremity of meeting once a month. Came a time presently when but for Doc Bleeker, Jimmy the Cricket, Lafe Darby, Faro Dan, and the Butterfly Kid, all of whom resolutely refused to give up the fraternal ghost, the chapter would beyond doubt have suspended its meetings entirely. The proprietor of the Stagger Inn had flitted, and Jimmy the Cricket, who coveted a business of his own, had bought him out on the advice of Doc Bleeker, who assured him the camp was bound to boom again. Naturally Lafe Darby retained his old position at the Stagger Inn bar, for he believed in patronizing a fraternal brother when he had any money to spend. Moreover, when in the financial doldrums the distress word and the distress signal would often work on Jimmy the Cricket.

Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid had long since emigrated to Toquina City, sixty miles distant, for as the needle of a compass points unerringly to the magnetic north, so Dan and the Butterfly followed the cash. Nevertheless, they were loyal to Kelcey's Wells and Doc Bleeker. Once a month they would fold their respective layouts and come across in the auto stage to Kelcey's Wells to attend the meeting of the Ornery and Worthless Men.

Eventually, however, came a time when even Doc Bleeker's optimism was not proof against the indubitable evidence that Kelcey's Wells was, in Faro Dan's terminology, a white chip on a dead card. This evidence arrived in the shape of the financial secretary's report at a time when the chapter had on its roll of membership fifteen Ornery and Worthless Men. At a certain monthly meeting the financial secretary reported that owing to non-payment of dues nine of the fifteen were up for expulsion!

"Let 'em go," growled Doc Bleeker passionately. "They haven't any more loyalty than a pack of coyotes!"

Faro Dan moved their expulsion. Lafe Darby seconded it, and membership in Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World, had dwindled to the five original incorporators and the former Worthy Junior Potentate, the fly-by-night stockbroker, who had long since flown to other and more fruitful fields, but who nevertheless, had maintained himself in good standing although he had not attended a meeting since before the panic. He was a shrewd little Jew, by name Milton Selinsky. With the financial acumen of his race he had looked into the future, foretelling to himself the very motion which Faro Dan now proceeded to make. That ornery and worthless individual rose in his place as Senior Potentate, saluted with the sign of the order and addressed Doc Bleeker as follows:

"Worthy Supreme Potentate! Three years ago the brothers present conceived this here order in charity, loyalty, an' fraternity. Tonight after a glorious past, we find ourselves descended from a membership of one thousand to the original incorporators, plus Brother Selinsky. We've charged off thousands o' dollars' worth

o' dues an' begged an' pleaded, an' give the brothers an extension o' time, a-provin' our charity, but it ain't no use. We've been faithful to the lodge, a-provin' we've got loyalty, and we've hung to you, Worthy Supreme Potentate, a-provin' we got fraternity. Toquina City's peterin' out, and it ain't goin' to be long before me an' the Butterfly'll be movin' on. Considerin' the nature of our profession an' the further fact that on an' after the first o' next month gamblin' in Nevada's a felony, it's right hard tellin' just where me an' the Butterfly lights."

He paused and gazed at each brother, as if seeking forgiveness for the monstrous proposition he was about to enunciate. Doc Bleeker eyed him owlshly. He knew what Faro Dan was going to say; knew at last that it was inevitable that some brother should say it; so he waited now in apathetic silence for Faro Dan to speak the damnable words.

"Worthy Supreme Potentate," continued Faro Dan, drawing a paper from his vest pocket and handing it to the Worthy Financial Secretary-Recording-Secretary-Organist-Junior Potentate, "in accordance with the constitution an' by-laws o' Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men o' the World, I hereby give notice in writing that at the next regular monthly meetin' o' the chapter I shall present this important motion: "RESOLVED: That Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men o' the World, disincorporate an' divide the cash to the credit o' the chapter among all members in good standin'—"

His speech was received in a heavy silence that presaged a chorus of "ayes" when the motion should come up for consideration, and amidst a general feeling of gloom the chapter adjourned for the next regular monthly meeting. They reconvened for a nightcap at the Stagger Inn, where Doc Bleeker reluctantly admitted

that since it was obvious that the order was about to die there was nothing to be gained by permitting it to suffer; that it was best to kill it and put it out of its misery.

Affairs had come to an impasse. His practice was no more, his ready cash was gone, and he must perforce turn his back on Kelcey's Wells. Jimmy the Cricket was hourly expecting the arrival of the sheriff with an attachment against the Stagger Inn and although Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid never mentioned such trifles, the fact remained that a desert rat from the Ubehebes had broken Dan's faro bank; a pair of trained dice, artfully interjected into the Butterfly's affairs, had well-nigh ruined him, and the old mythological bird was about to present Lafe Darby with Number Six which naturally complicated matters for Lafe. Therefore, since the lodge still had approximately twenty-five thousand dollars in bank, the forthcoming dividend to the faithful loomed up in all the pristine glory of paradise regained. Privately, four of the brothers wondered how long one-sixth of twenty-five thousand dollars would last Lafe Darby.

The question was settled sooner than they anticipated. Lafe Darby forsook the rattlesnake juice of the Stagger Inn and tilted against the demon that lies in Tahiti gin. From the languorous isles of the South Seas comes this drink—and a story. We vouch neither for the drink, which is a curious combination of dynamite and dynamic energy, nor for the story, which is to the general effect that a shark will not bite a native who has partaken of Tahiti gin manufactured on his own premises. Be that as it may, we venture the suggestion that a white man primed with the heinous concoction would bite a shark, but regret that there are no statistics available to substantiate this.

A godless adventurer, one Mr. Bud Menefee, had imported a keg of this liquid hell for the purpose of mixing it with prune juice, the resultant concoction to be secretly retailed at three dollars a quart to a number of Piute Indians of assorted sexes, who would shortly pass through Kelcey's Wells bound for the annual harvest of piñon nuts in the Painted Hills across the desert. Lafe saw the keg when Mr. Menefee rolled it into his tent house, and feeling venturesome, had requested a modicum as a chaser after his morning's morning which had recently gone the way of such. Mr. Menefee, in a spirit of mingled charity and curiosity, had acceded to his request.

After partaking of the fiery stuff Lafe felt within him the stirrings of a vague ambition. "That's the ticket!" he declared approvingly. "The liquor this here vandal, Jimmy the Cricket, hands over his bar must be di-luted. I can't work up no circulation on that liquor no more, Bud. It acts on me like lubricatin' oil on a gasoline engine—smooth enough but not a speck o' power. Gimme another, Bud. That lick sure carries authority."

Mr. Menefee received this Oliver Twistian request with a suggestion that Lafe perform that impossible athletic stunt known as chasing oneself; whereupon Lafe sought his wife and demanded of her the sum of five dollars, which she did not possess. Upon being informed of this disastrous state of the family finances Lafe forthwith reproved the presumptuous female with the aid of a washboard. Then he searched the onyx clock, relic of that distant day when Mrs. Darby had taken him for better or worse, and unearthed two dollars and fifty cents. His wife had set this sum aside for the purpose of meeting Lafe's dues in the Ornery and Worthless Men of the World. Poor creature! She had

never gotten over that delirious night when Lafe in rented evening clothes had taken her to supper at the Palace Hotel, following the monster initiation three years ago.

Lafe returned to the Menefee deadfall and purchased ten cents' worth of Tahiti gin. After drinking it he commenced to weep, he knew not why. At the third drink he became a second Alexander, yearning for unconquered worlds, and gazing from heights of lofty disdain upon the narrow horizon which environed him, Lafe Darby, the much-maligned and misunderstood man of parts, discernment and epicurean appetite. After swallowing the fourth drink he reached some esoteric conclusion, purchased a quart bottle of his new love, and with it under his arm started down Mizpah Avenue at the foot of which stood the Darby domicile. And as he went he sang a little, lilting ballad of the dance halls so long silent in Kelcey's Wells.

When he came to the pathway leading through the sand and sparse sage to his own doorway he paused, tilted the bottle to his lips and drank a farewell toast to Mrs. Darby. Then he walked down the gulch out into the blinding glare that spread afar toward the Painted Hills and the mirage that beckoned, receding, trembling, alluring. On and on he went, the little conical twister-breezes raising the dust behind him, obliterating his trail, hiding him from the sight of men.

The dust whirled in the vagrant, fetid breeze and settled when it had done its appointed work; the lazy afternoon waned until the tinselled tapestry of the soft desert night came down and hid the Painted Hills. The stars that had looked upon a million eons of change and interchange whirled on their ordained journeyings, but to Kelcey's Wells, Lafe Darby came not again.

When morning came, with it came Mrs. Darby, sob-

bing as she crept up Mizpah Avenue because she knew that men would look upon her and know that Lafe had beaten her. She sought Doc Bleeker to inform him that Lafe had stayed out all night, in consequence of which she knew that something dreadful had happened. The Doc soothed her, although he did not agree with her. Any catastrophe that provided for the merciful elimination of Lafe Darby could not be very dreadful.

The doctor looked in at the Stagger Inn and saw at once that Lafe had indeed left Kelcey's Wells. Bud Menefee reported having seen Lafe walking down the gulch the day previous, so a search party was organized to comb the random trails among the sage and greasewood for ten miles round Kelcey's Wells. The following day the search party returned—thirsty, exhausted, empty-handed, consumed with a huge disgust for Lafe Darby and a firm resolve to search for him no more.

The blasting in the Big Princess, where the hopeful still searched for the lost lead, continued as before, and the stink of burned powder drifted up Mizpah Avenue. Men worked or gambled or fought or drank as usual, and no man missed Lafe Darby save Jimmy the Cricket up at the Stagger Inn. For the better part of a day the Cricket had difficulty in convincing himself that Lafe was really gone. He seemed to see the derelict standing at the bar, his right foot on the brass rail, his sickly white hand clasped tightly round a whisky glass. Ere long that picture faded too and was gone. It is the fate of all good drinking men to be forgotten very soon.

However, Lafe was not yet forgotten entirely. True, he had passed from the sight and ken of the remnant of the population of Kelcey's Wells, but Mrs. Darby still loved and remembered. It almost seemed as if Lafe's frailties had endeared him to her the more. Down in the drab-colored lean-to in Squatter-town she

continued to live and labor and have her being, such as it was. A worn wisp of a woman with a sheeplike meekness of nature, she was a singularly pathetic creature. There was a squint in her eyes from too much sunlight; there was a permanent stoop in her thin shoulders not meant for bearing burdens—and she had borne many burdens and many children. In her hair was a sprinkling of white, as if the saline dust of the little twister-breezes had fallen upon her and she had been too tired to brush it away.

During the procession of garish days that followed the disappearance of Lafe she groped her way about her tubs in apathetic wonder, not quite understanding and hence not complaining. Her dreary round of labors was uninterrupted. Each Monday she gathered her bundles of clothing; each Saturday afternoon and evening she returned them rejuvenated, collected the meager pittance that was the reward of her heart-breaking, back-aching toil, and crept back to her hovel in Squatter-town.

She was not aware of the extent of the finances of Lafe's lodge, Lafe having considered her intelligence too meager for the discussion of matters of business; but she did know that according to the constitution and by-laws, a copy of which Lafe had once brought home, the lodge paid the funeral expenses of all members, and in addition presented the widow with two hundred and fifty dollars.

With Doc Bleeker at the head of the order she did not feel called upon to make application, as Lafe's widow, for this honorarium. She had the utmost confidence in Doc and knew he would look after her interests, for had he not inducted four of Lafe's progeny into this world and declined to send a bill, saying he was too busy but would get round to it some day!

When two weeks had passed, however, and the doctor

had taken no action, Mrs. Darby grew a little anxious, although mingled with her anxiety was a feeling of shame at her lack of faith in the doctor. Moreover, a posthumous Darby heir was very imminent, and the knowledge that ere long she would be forced to retire from the tubs for a brief season spurred her to the point where she mustered her poor courage and spoke to the Doc about it.

The Worthy Supreme Potentate was visibly embarrassed as he explained to her that, while he had no doubt but that Lafe had been gathered to his fathers, the lodge, nevertheless, required proof of death. He was sorry, he said, but she'd have to wait until he took the matter up at the regular monthly meeting.

Doc was as good as his word. He brought the matter up at the next meeting, and forthwith Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World, developed something the like of which had not hitherto disgraced its charitable, loyal, and fraternal deliberations—to wit, a lovely row!

It started with the Worthy Supreme Potentate explaining the predicament of the widow of the late Junior Warden, and requested suggestions from the brothers. The Butterfly Kid obliged instantly.

"What's the odds?" he queried. "When we disincorporate we'll give her Lafe's share of the swag, anyhow, if he ain't round here to receive it. All we got to do is to wait until the lodge is killed and that kink in our by-laws ain't in operation any longer. It's as easy as fallin' downstairs."

Jimmy the Cricket and Faro Dan nodded approval. "If she's hard up in the meantime," the latter suggested, "I guess me an' the Butterfly can help her out with an advance. I understand she's a-goin' to require your services right soon, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

The Worthy Supreme Potentate nodded and raised

his gavel. "Very well, then, brothers," he said, "there being no objection it is so ordered," and he struck the altar before him a rap that said: "That settles it."

But here an objection was interposed. The fly-by-night broker, the little Jew, who had waited three years for the cutting of this melon, interposed it. Tersely and firmly he called the attention of the chapter to Faro Dan's resolution introduced earlier in the evening—to wit, that the assets of the lodge were to be divided among those members in good standing at the time of dissolution. He objected to the payment of any funds to the widow, under the by-laws, until proof of death should be submitted, but in the event of such proof being adduced and the payment from the funeral fund being made to Lafe's widow, he was of the opinion that there the Darby interest in the jackpot ceased. There was nothing in the by-laws to indicate that a membership in the Ornerly and Worthless Men of the World continued after death, or that the benefits of such membership should accrue to heirs or assigns.

"You're outvoted, four to one, Selinsky," Faro Dan growled ominously. No vote had been taken, but Faro Dan was reasonably certain of the soundness of his contention nevertheless.

"Yes," added Jimmy the Cricket, "an' I might add, Brother Selinsky, that it seems mighty damned strange to me that after neglectin' every meetin' of this chapter since its formation, you manage to show up at the next to the final meeting, to quote the by-laws on us an' disrupt the order o' business. Set down!"

The Worthy Supreme Potentate knew Jimmy the Cricket. None better than he realized that war was in the air. He pounded with his gavel and demanded order.

"I call for a rulin' from the chair," yelled Jimmy the Cricket.

"The chair rules that Brother Selinsky is right in his contention but wrong in his method of operation. Under the constitution and by-laws we have no legal right to distribute Brother Darby's share of the assets of this lodge to his widow. Brother Selinsky's point is well taken."

"That's what I say," Brother Selinsky retorted triumphantly. "When it comes to dividing the assets of the chapter it's split five ways and not six."

Said Faro Dan evenly: "You're too handy at jugglin' figgers to suit me, Brother Selinsky. I'll admit my course ain't legal, but it's plum human. You're outvoted in this here assembly, the majority rules, an' if I hear another cheep out o' you we shore will be dividin' this bankroll five ways instead o' six, because you'll be missin'."

They stood glowering at each other like two belligerent dogs, and presently Faro Dan, deciding on a monumental bluff, reached under his Senior Potentate's robes, unearthed a piece of artillery and laid it before him on the altar of charity, loyalty, and fraternity. He stood up.

"I make a motion," he said, "that's bound to come within the by-laws. I move that one-sixth o' the cash on hand be turned into an Imminent Distress Fund."

The Butterfly Kid caught the cue. "Second the motion," he shouted. The Worthy Supreme Potentate put the motion and three enthusiastic "Ayes" carried it as against one vigorous "No."

"I move, Worthy Supreme Potentate," Faro Dan continued, "that every dollar in the Imminent Distress Fund be donated to the widow of our beloved Junior Warden, Lafe Darby. There ain't nothin' in our by-laws agin makin' donations. This here order's founded on charity."

The motion was carried. Milton Selinsky, seeing he was defeated, rose, saluted the Worthy Supreme Potentate and retired from the hall in high dudgeon.

Faro Dan winked and shook his sinful head with a little air of triumph. "I'm a sharp on circumventin' the by-laws," he declared. "While this chapter's in full swing the majority decides what it's goin' to do with its money, but after we're disincorporated by the secretary of state this here Selinsky person's got us plumb within the law."

"He's got an ace coppered somewhere," warned Jimmy the Cricket.

They proceeded to draw up the resolution to disincorporate, and the petition to the secretary of state for permission so to do, went through the usual routine of business and adjourned. The following morning Faro Dan, treasurer, drew a check to the order of Mrs. Lafe Darby, signed it, and accompanied by the Butterfly Kid went looking for Doc Bleeker to countersign it.

When finally he found the Worthy Supreme Potentate it was in Lafe Darby's drab tent house in Squattertown. The Doc had been up all night inducting young Mr. Darby into Kelcey's Wells. He was haggard and worn, and it occurred to Faro Dan that matters had not gone well with him.

"What luck?" the gambler demanded crisply.

"None. Come in, boys, I want you to see something."

They stepped into an inner room. On a bed fashioned from rough pine lumber Mrs. Lafe Darby lay with an old patchwork quilt drawn over her. Doc lifted it and Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid saw a newborn baby lying at her breast.

"Dead, both of 'em," said Doc, and commenced to sniff a little. He always wept whenever he lost a patient. The two gamblers gazed at Brother Darby's handiwork,

and presently Faro Dan took the check from his vest pocket and slowly tore it into little bits.

"Too late," he said briefly.

Doc led them to another room, where five tousle-headed youngsters, the eldest about eight years old, lay huddled asleep on an old box mattress on the floor.

"Tough," he blubbered.

"You bet," said Faro Dan.

"Hell!" said the Butterfly Kid.

There was a long silence, broken presently by Faro Dan. "Wait here," he said; "I'm goin' uptown an' get Selinsky."

He found Milton Selinsky in the office of the justice of the peace, soliciting from that functionary an order restraining Samuel Bleeker *et al.*, members and officers of Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, O. & W. M. O. T. W., from disbursing any of the funds of the order pending the decision of a suit about to be entered into against the said order by the said Milton Selinsky.

"Come here," said Faro Dan. There was that in his voice that caused Milton Selinsky to come without asking questions, and Faro Dan led him to the Darby domicile and bade him look. Selinsky came out of that arena of want and misery and joined the trio in the kitchen. "Any relatives?" he asked, indicating the room where the five orphans slept.

Doc Bleeker, Faro Dan, and the Butterfly Kid shook their heads.

"Pretty tough," he continued. "Can't we do something?"

His three auditors nodded. "We're going to make up a jack-pot to care for them kids," said Faro Dan.

"Count me in on it, gentlemen. I haven't got much, but I guess I can match the rest of you. Whose family is this?"

"The family of Junior Warden, Lafe Darby," Doc Bleeker answered solemnly.

Selinsky pondered. He scratched his ear and presently looked at his watch. "I was going out on the auto stage at ten o'clock," he said, "but I guess I'll stay over until tomorrow. We can hold a meeting tonight."

"Pardner," said Faro Dan, "I was mistook in you. I used some words to you last night that was mighty unfraternal. I'm sorry." He held out his hand and Selinsky shook it.

"Oh," he said carelessly, "that was business. This"—he jerked a fat thumb toward the Darby orphans—"is charity. And I didn't know—"

"Ain't that a Jew for you!" said the Butterfly Kid, and smote Milton Selinsky affectionately across the back.

Shortly after eight o'clock that night Doc Bleeker lighted the kerosene lamps in the opera house, got out the rituals and laid them on the altars. When Milton Selinsky, Faro Dan, the Butterfly Kid, and Jimmy the Cricket arrived, he donned the black silk robe and draped round his neck the scarlet plush stole with the gold cord trimmings that was the emblem of his office of Supreme Potentate. Faro Dan, as Senior Potentate, wore a white robe with a black plush stole with silver cord trimmings, while the Butterfly Kid, as Junior Potentate, wore a red robe with a yellow plush stole with black velvet trimmings. Jimmy the Cricket, Senior Warden, took his place just inside the door, for all the world as if a horde of brothers was clamoring for admittance in the anteroom, and Milton Selinsky occupied the recording secretary's desk. When all were ready the Worthy Supreme Potentate tapped three times with his gavel and said:

"The meeting will come to order. The Worthy Chaplain will offer prayer."

Faro Dan, who combined that office with several others, owing to the depleted membership, rose, fixed his glance on a spot high up on the wall over Jimmy the Cricket's head, and prayed:

"O Lord, we are gathered here tonight in charity and brotherly love. Grant that we be given the strength to approach the task before us, as Ornery and Worthless Men of the World, in the true spirit of charity and fraternity, and when we shall have concluded the labors for the consummation of which we have here assembled this night, grant, O Lord, that we may depart in peace, with malice toward none and charity toward all. Amen."

At the word "Amen" the Butterfly Kid, who had taken his place at the organ, played the hymn of the chapter, and the chapter sang in chorus. At its conclusion the Worthy Supreme Potentate tapped three times with his gavel. "I now, by virtue of the power invested in me as Supreme Potentate of Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Ornery and Worthless Men of the World, declare this meeting open for business. The recording secretary will call the roll," he declared solemnly.

The recording secretary thereupon called the roll, to which all present answered "Here!" When he called, "Junior Warden, Lafayette Darby," the Worthy Supreme Potentate answered "Absent!"

"If there is no objection," the Worthy Supreme Potentate continued, "we will dispense with the reading of the previous minutes. Report of the financial secretary."

Faro Dan, acting as financial secretary-treasurer, read his report, showing \$24,987.03 cash on hand and in bank. He reported a bill of fifteen dollars for three

months' hall rent, which was ordered paid, and the Worthy Supreme Potentate proceeded with the regular order of business as laid down in the ritual:

"Report of Membership Committee?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"Report on sick and disabled brethren?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"Report of Building Committee?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"Candidates for initiation?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"Communications?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"New business?"

"None, Worthy Supreme Potentate."

"Good of the order?"

Faro Dan stood up, "I move you, Worthy Supreme Potentate," he said, "that we take every goddam chip in the kitty and split it five ways among the five dependent orphan kids of our beloved late Junior Warden, Lafayette Darby. I further move the appointment by the chair of a committee of five members of the chapter to handle, invest, and administer the said funds for an' on behalf o' the said Darby orphans, to the end that the said orphans be educated an' raised self-respectin' men and women."

Faro Dan sat down and looked at Milton Selinsky, who had told him he would match any and all donations. Selinsky smiled at him. "I second the motion," he said, and the Worthy Supreme Potentate presented the motion.

"You have all heard the motion. All those in favor—"

"Aye," came the resounding chorus.

"Contrary-minded?"

A silence.

"The motion is carried unanimously. On that committee," said the Worthy Supreme Potentate, "I appoint Brother Selinsky chairman, owing to the fact that he is a business man and comes of a race that can make two dollars grow where but one grew before. Brothers Jimmy the Cricket, Faro Dan, the Butterfly Kid, and Samuel Bleeker will also serve on the committee, and the committee will continue to perform the functions for which it has been appointed until discharged by Almighty God. Is there any further business?"

"I move we adjourn," said Brother Selinsky.

"A motion to adjourn is always in order." The Worthy Supreme Potentate turned to the Butterfly Kid.

"The Worthy Organist," he said, "will play the closing ode."

When the mellow notes of the organ had died away the Worthy Supreme Potentate tapped three times with his gavel, and the Chapter stood up.

"The Worthy Chaplain," he said, "will offer prayer."

"O Lord," said Faro Dan, "we give Thee thanks that Thou hast permitted us to assemble once more in council to promulgate the spirit of charity, loyalty, and fraternity. And as we go hence we beseech Thee, O Lord, to guide our erring footsteps in the paths of righteousness. Grant us, O Lord, in the end a haven of rest in green fields, where, lulled to sleep by running water and the drowsy drone of bees, we shall await, in the heavenly chapter on high, reunion with our brethren of Kelcey's Wells Chapter No. 1, Order of Ornery and Worthless Men of the World. Amen."

The Worthy Supreme Potentate raised his head. On his simple, kindly face a twisted little smile was struggling for expression, but his eyes were blurred with

tears, for he was closing his lodge for the last time, and, oh, he was so proud of it! For the last time his glance had rested upon the mummery the great underlying sympathy in his nature craved; for the last time he had listened to the humbug that must have reached to the bars of the Supreme Potentate in the heavenly chapter on high, making Him, to whom this godless gambler prayed his parrot prayer, just a little proud of the fact that He had made five Ornery and Worthless Men of the World in His own image and likeness.

"The—the Wor-Worthy Senior Warden will collect the rituals," Doc said huskily.

The Worthy Senior Warden performed his simple office for the last time; for the last time the Worthy Supreme Potentate rapped for order; for the last time he said with homely dignity:

"In charity, loyalty, and fraternity I declare this meeting adjourned—forever!"

Silver Threads Among the Gold

DURING twenty-five years of unrestrained wandering over the mineral belt of western North America they were two. Then Toby came and they were three. And this is the story of the three—how they foregathered, how old age came upon them, and how they parted.

Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John were long, lank sons of the sage-brush country, born and bred in the open and raised by the hair of their heads. They had little education, but had managed to assimilate sufficient knowledge of mineralogy to enable them to call themselves good prospectors. Where they got their nicknames, or how and why earned, is a matter that concerns us not, although a pair of tremendous, wide, flat feet on Sam and a habit which John possessed of singing, when drunk, certain unprintable stanzas laudatory of the life and personal characteristics of a debauchee famous in frontier fiction may possibly account for it.

So much for our two leading men. As for Toby, he was the plainest of yellow dogs, and Snowshoe Sam won him in a poker game in Panamint, Toby having gone into the pot at an assessed valuation of five dollars. It was a matter of common knowledge that Toby had a perfectly incurable and prenatal aversion to rattlesnakes, and would bark and carry on at a fearful rate whenever he sniffed one around camp—which accomplishment naturally conferred upon Toby the respect of all men who camped, and invested him with a definite

value above and beyond the delight which those who are unable to afford a yellow dog always take in maintaining one.

Repeated and variegated scandal was obvious in Toby's family tree. A true cosmopolite was Toby and a representative type from the melting-pot of Dogdom. He had the long powerful jaws of an English bull, the alert little ears of a fox-terrier, the coat and general color scheme of an Irish wolf-dog and the torso and legs of an Airedale terrier. His tail was his crowning glory, in that it was brief and terminated in a plenteous hairy tassel. This abbreviated caudal excuse Toby (as became a dog of parts) ever held aloft, twitching triumphantly at nothing in particular.

Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John then were prospectors. Each, when speaking to a third person of the other, would refer to him as "my pardner," which term, in the West, has all other synonyms for friendship relegated to disuse. Having lived their lives close to nature they were tolerably familiar with the habits and bad manners of rattlesnakes, particularly with the most reprehensible habit of these interesting reptiles—that of insisting upon sharing a man's blankets with him of a cold night. Consequently they had long cast envious glances upon Toby, and great was their joy when Snowshoe Sam won him in the poker pot.

However, they were shrewd enough to realize that while Snowshoe Sam had won Toby's body, his canine soul might still cleave to his former owner; so they caressed Toby much and fed him until his gaunt belly sagged. Toby, ever hungry of heart and stomach, was unaffectedly appreciative of this welcome, and although only a yellow dog was nevertheless sufficiently human to form the link necessary to a perfect trinity with Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John. When they moved

north from Panamint, Toby followed, scorning leading strings and justifying his reputation and Snowshoe's daring and judgment as a poker player at least three nights out of every week.

However, in addition to sniffing out neighborly snakes and furnishing company to his pardners, Toby also performed an additional function. In the winter, when his masters had spread their tarpaulins on the ground and bedded down for the night, it was Toby's duty to creep in at the foot and render a correct imitation of a warm brick applied to the chilled pedal extremities of Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John. It was not at all an unusual thing for Sinful John to awaken in the dead of night and say:

"Snowshoe, where's that danged Toby dog? Kick him over my way, won't you? I'm like to freeze to death at my feet." Whereupon Snowshoe Sam would spurn Toby upon his southern extension and without further ado Toby would crawl over on Sinful John's side and proceed to radiate his animal heat where it would do the most good. Upon occasions he radiated woodticks, but then what is a woodtick more or less between pardners, I should like to be informed?

Both Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John were quite as queer as their dog Toby. Both were on the down-grade to the forties when first they met and felt for each other that mutual attraction which was to render them inseparable for the succeeding thirty years.

Thirty years of wandering through sunlight and snowfall, thirty years of hunger and thirst, want and plenty, wealth and poverty, blistering days and frigid nights! Think of it! And then reflect that the greatest test of friendship and good-fellowship is a three weeks' camping trip with an alleged chum. One may then presume to gage the feeling which these two pardners

each entertained for the other. It was more than the affection of brother for brother, for brothers are ever intolerant of each other, and the same blood will not fuse when exposed to the test of thirty such years as Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John had passed together.

This ancient mutual regard both Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John expressed in the most picturesque manner imaginable. In conversation on the most trivial subjects it was their invariable habit to call each other strange and profane names! A mutual exchange of malediction was inevitable and unavoidable the moment they opened their lips to speak to each other.

For instance: It would have been absolutely impossible for Snowshoe Sam to have said to Sinful John, "Sinful, please pass the beans." He would have said instead, "Fork over them *frijoles*, you slab-sided libel on the human race. You blankety blank blank, ain't you aimin' to leave none for me an' Toby?" And were it not for the fact that this story may fall under the eyes of Respectability (minus a sense of humor), I could relate to you the exact wording of Sinful John's reply to this simple request. Yes, sir. Sinful John would certainly make a reply.

Despite his suggestive cognomen, however, Sinful John was stronger mentally, morally, and physically than Snowshoe Sam. He, therefore, while younger by a year than Snowshoe, assumed instinctively a paternal attitude toward Snowshoe, who on numerous occasions had demonstrated that he was a weak brother. He even went so far at one time as to permit a buxom biscuit-shooter in the railroad eating-house at Mojave to lure him away from Sinful John. That was in the days when they owned the Bonnie Claire Mine and were reputed to be on the highroad to millions, although subsequently the vein pinched out and left them with nothing more

tangible than a hole in the ground and a medley of vain regrets, tintured by a consuming thirst.

However, I deviate from my muttons. Snowshoe Sam, puling sentimentalist and putative millionaire at forty-five, had been snared by this biscuit-shooter. Sinful John was suspicious of the lady's love from the start. He didn't figure that it assayed very high in pure gold, and he told Snowshoe as much.

"That there lady's love," quoth Sinful John, "reminds me of a copper prospect. There ain't much of it an' it's scattered pretty free, an' most of it's just stain at that. Two bits' worth of pure copper ore scattered over an acre of ground's enough to start a stampede, an' a smile from this lady's got you to stampedin' an' prospectin' for high-grade ore where there ain't nothin' but country rock an' bull quartz."

Nevertheless, despite Sinful John's wishes and advice, Snowshoe Sam eloped with the lady to Bakersfield and married her. He was gone two weeks, during which time poor Sinful John remained in Mojave, thoroughly jingled. When the Snowshoes returned from their honeymoon, Sinful John discovered that he had traded pardners in the Bonnie Claire Mine. Snowshoe had deeded his half-interest to Mrs. Snowshoe, so Sinful John drew the lady aside, confronted her with his knowledge of her previous husband, whose title, while clouded, still held good, and demanded the transfer of Snowshoe's half-interest back to Snowshoe. He got it and then gave her five hundred dollars to elope once more with one of Snowshoe's disappointed rivals or face a charge of bigamy. It was very simple. Then Sinful John packed his burros and started back to the Bonnie Claire Mine, and at Olancho, sixty-odd miles up the desert valley, Snowshoe Sam caught up with him. Sinful John was baking a little mess of sour

dough bread when Snowshoe came romping into camp, smiling like the head of an old fiddle.

"Hello, you dejected, splay-footed son of a Shoshone horse thief," said Sinful John innocently, "where's our beloved wife?"

"Sinful," said Snowshoe, "we ain't got no more wife."

"Sho," said Sinful John sympathetically, "what's come betwixt you an' your happiness, Snowshoe?"

"A tin-horn gambler. She bled me dry an' run off with another prospect."

"Nevertheless an' ag'in, Snowshoe, I don't hear you a-singin', 'Hearts Bowed Down by Weight o' Woe, to Fondest Mem'ries Clings.'"

"Sinful," Snowshoe acknowledged, "you was right all the time. It was all a mistake an' I'm glad she's gone. Joy ain't no name to what I feel this minute. It's what you might term delirious deelight. Good reddance to bad medicine, an' if ever that woman comes projectin' around the Bonnie Claire for her half o' the clean-up, I'll shore make her hard to ketch."

"You im-beecile," roared Sinful John and shook a skillet under Sam's nose. Then he returned quietly to his sour dough. He judged it best to leave Snowshoe in ignorance of the manner in which he (Sinful John) had relieved his pardner of his marital incubus, under the mistaken apprehension that Snowshoe was too violently and incurably in love to perform that service for himself. If he had only waited another week and saved five hundred dollars! It never occurred to Sinful John that Snowshoe would hear the desert calling and harken to a sane suggestion when his period of madness had passed. Consequently, for the first and only time during their long partnership Sinful John was angry. Perhaps he was jealous! *Quien sabe?* He was

mighty fond of Snowshoe and the woman was a jade; although, with all her faults, Snowshoe might love her still. He was weak enough for that.

"This doggone Snowshoe's got a childish natur that-a-way," mused Sinful John, "so I better keep my part in this to myself or he might feel hurt. Snowshoe's a weak vessel some ways an' it ain't policy to fill him up until he plumb busts."

Thus Sinful John justified his first deceit to Snowshoe Sam. Presently you shall learn how, in the years that followed, that simple deceit, like a curse, came home to roost.

Thereafter the partnership continued unbroken. From the Yukon to the Cordilleras, from Leadville to the western slope of the Sierras, they wandered wherever and whenever they heard the call of their species, making money and losing it, gambling, rioting, sinning, thirsting, starving, freezing, roasting, fighting, cursing, and loving through all the long glad years. Both were true sons of the Wide Horizons, and the purple distances drew them on with specious promises that the fields ahead would always be the greenest!

For that is the Lure of Gold. And little by little, as one acquires the drink habit, the wanderlust claimed them, body and bones, in the end, and they became members in good standing of the Mysterious Order of Desert Rats, shunning civilization except at long intervals, which grew longer with the years, possessing little, wanting little, requiring little. Sunrise and sunset, boots and rough clothing, cartridges, dynamite, grub, an occasional bottle of whisky, chewing tobacco, and a snug camping place up a draw where there was sweet water and galleta grass for the burros—that was all, unless you include their beautiful desert, rimmed by distant saw-toothed mountain ranges that danced in the heat

like giant's branding irons, ready to remedy any defect in a task long since completed—the imprinting upon Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John of something of their own masterful and inscrutable personality. In the hot silent places Nature is queer that way. She likes her children made to her own image and likeness, and after thirty years she had turned out a finished job in Snowshoe Sam and Sinful John. They were old and gnarly and brown and burnt and wondrously wrinkled, and crested, like the all-encircling mountains, with the conventional white!

As I have already stated, in the twenty-fifth year of their partnership they acquired Toby. Snowshoe won him, but despite that fact he belonged to the firm. Toby seemed to realize this, for he distributed his affections and his vermin impartially. Ensued more years of “ratting” in the California deserts, and then the trio crossed into Nevada at Silver Peak and pressed slowly north across Big Smoky Valley.

In a cañon in the Toyabe Range they struck a rich placer and sunk a shaft to bedrock, after which they rigged a crude rocker and commenced panning for a stake sufficient to purchase a gasoline hoist, timber, ore-buckets, and other equipment necessary to handle the pay gravel at a profit. They were tremendously happy and excited, washing about twenty dollars a day between them, for all of their years together they had dreamed of a claim like this and they found much enjoyment now in planning for the future as striplings plan; for in their minds' eyes they beheld themselves millionaires!

Snowshoe Sam, weak creature, showed the trend of his thoughts one day by reminding Sinful John that it was almost time they quit hellin' around, selected nice young wives and settled down to the enjoyments of a

bourgeois existence of middle life, with a wife and kids and a few dollars in the bank. Snowshoe figured that he might dabble in politics—stand for sheriff or justice of the peace or some such modest office in an effort to make the time pass agreeably. It was a tentative feeler, put forth for what pathetic reason God only knows; but Sinful John, being a wild young blade of sixty-six, promptly hooted it down. *He* was for playing the game until he got old! It would be time enough then to settle down, provided he found the right woman.

When three months had passed their activities with the rocker and pan had enabled them to amass sufficient bullion to proceed to Tonopah, purchase the equipment they desired and have it hauled out to the claim. However, this mission to Tonopah would have to be a one-man job, for Sinful John realized, out of the fulness of past experience, that should they go to Tonopah together they would naturally celebrate their return to civilization with "just one drink," and that meant a return to the claim without the equipment, to start panning for another stake. It had been that way for thirty years, and Sinful John was too much of a philosopher to attempt reform at this late date! Company predicated conviviality; therefore the success of their foray back to civilization lay not in numbers. Their strength lay in their weakness, for given a mission of trust their weakness could develop surprising strength. So Sinful John decided to send Snowshoe Sam out for the machinery.

To his infinite surprise, however, Snowshoe Sam showed no interest in the trip, although a year before he would have been all eagerness to make it. After marveling at this changed point of view for half a day, Sinful decided that Snowshoe didn't want the responsibility of solitude and fifteen hundred dollars, and that

a trip to Tonopah without indulgence in the rough frolics of their kind was not to his liking. Sinful himself had long since discovered that there could be no real joy in painting a camp red unless Snowshoe Sam accompanied him to give it an extra coat for good measure. Consequently, realizing these things, Sinful John merely said "Sho," and dropped the subject. Later, however, he was struck by a particularly brilliant idea and hastened to impart it to Snowshoe.

"Snowshoe," he said, "you depraved old skunk, tell you what we'll do. We'll pan another month for spendin' money, and then we'll both go into Tonopah, buy our equipment first thing, make all arrangements to freight her out, lay in some grub an' clothes, an' then—"

His pause was eloquent. But Snowshoe did not answer. He was gazing down the cañon and out over Big Smoky, as if appraising the strength of its vast blue shimmering expanse of sage and sand. After a long time he said:

"It'll be a hard trip."

"But think of the fun at the end of it," urged the optimistic John.

"We'll think it over," sighed Snowshoe Sam.

So they hoisted pay gravel with their rude windlass and panned industriously for another month, and then Sinful John made a discovery. For some time past Snowshoe Sam had failed to assimilate his bacon and beans and sour dough with the old-time relish, and the thought came to Sinful John that perhaps Snowshoe was growing old! Still he was only sixty-seven, so it couldn't be that! Sinful John—the skittish hobbledohoy—was sixty-six himself, and he was quite sure *he* wasn't feeling old. He was as young as he was that first dawn in the long ago when he and Snowshoe Sam first rose out of the sage together, stretched their

young legs and viewed their dreadful empire. Wherefore Sinful John, vain of his keen perception and proud in his own conceit, made an error of judgment.

He knew Snowshoe Sam to have been endowed at birth with certain weaknesses, and once he had given indubitable evidence of the greatest of these—woman; and suddenly Sinful John was appalled at the thought that perhaps his partner had at length reached the foolish age and was thinking of settling down! So he resolved to investigate, and after the habit of his kind he went the long way about it.

“Snowshoe,” he roared one breakfast-time, simulating a fearful rage, “you danged old buzzard, why ain’t you a-cleanin’ up your plate lately? Ain’t my cookin’ good enough—or are you a-hankerin’ for vittles cooked by a woman?”

Sinful John considered that remark the acme of conversational skill in that he had deftly steered the conversation into the channel he desired, and that without a flicker of suspicion. Snowshoe’s answer proved that the shot had gone home, for he evaded a direct reply.

“Oh, don’t bother me, you—you gallow’s fruit,” he replied.

“Traitor,” mused Sinful John. Then aloud—threateningly: “None o’ your lip to me, you sot! *Snowshoe, you feelin’ old an’ a-gettin’ them foolish thoughts that comes to the aged?*”

Oh, damnable speech! Rather than have offended Snowshoe Sam, Sinful John would have boiled himself in oil; yet, such are the caprices of the human mind that offend him he did, although in all affection Sinful had put forth that simple query. The tragedy of it lay in the fact that Snowshoe Sam *was* begin-

ning to feel old and get foolish thoughts such as come to the aged! His interest in the ancient fight for gold was waning. He wanted to lie in his blankets and doze when the alarm clock went off at five o'clock each morning, and after his tricks at the windlass he was finding it harder and harder to straighten up and rid his back of the painful kinks. And he had twinges of rheumatism in his gnarly legs, and his teeth were pathetic victims to the ravages of time. Indeed, unknown to Sinful John, Snowshoe had had a toothache for two weeks, for it was contrary to his code to complain or acknowledge pain.

Yes, without a doubt he was growing old, now that even Sinful John, least observing of men, had guessed his secret. He resented this. He wanted to be left alone.

Damn Sinful John! His amazing vitality and perennial youth were in themselves insults flaunted in his partner's face—a face a trifle swollen, by the way, and couldn't the pest *see* that Snowshoe had a toothache—"that most damned of all diseases"? Really, Sinful John's activities and manifest stupidity were absolutely distressing and a sudden fierce resentment awoke in old Snowshoe's heart at the thought of Sinful John's eagerness for work and his perfectly incurable habit of building castles in Spain. Why, the blithering old fool talked as if *he* meant to live forever!

"*Snowshoe, you feelin' old?*" He had repeated the query. He was adding insult to injury!

"None o' your business," came the rasping answer.

Now, if Snowshoe Sam had said this raucously and belligerently—just howled out the words and included a suitable adjective to qualify the noun business—Sinful John would have known that his pardner loved him still! But Snowshoe didn't say it that way. He just flipped the words out between his aching teeth in a

nasty viperish monotone that instantly convinced Sinful John beyond a doubt that his pardner was an ingrate of the deepest dye. Verily, one could live with a man thirty years and never know him! So, naturally, Sinful John resented this unfraternal answer to a most fraternal question, God not having gifted him with ultrasensitive perceptions, and he proved his humanity by snarling back—minus the usual loving adjectives and expletives.

"Well, you needn't get so nasty-nice about it, you dotard. Actin' like you do, it 'pears to me like you must be a-slippin' pretty well along into your second childhood—or mebbe it's your third. I dunno." He shrugged. "I 'lowed when you wedded that biscuit-shooter in Mojave twenty years ago you was in your second childhood then."

With difficulty Snowshoe Sam controlled himself and replied with what he considered the sublimated essence of sarcasm:

"Well, if I'd a-settled down an' tried ag'in with some good woman, I'd 'a' been a heap better off then I be right now, a-traipsin' over Gawd-A'mighty's world with an old he-hen like you. But, no! You don't even give me time to get a proper divorce an' try ag'in. You just keep a-pickin' on me, an' a-pickin, an' a-promisin', *an* a-paintin' pictures, *an'* a-talkin' o' better luck just over the next divide, *an'* a-lurin' o' me on an' not a-givin' me nary chanst to marry ag'in an' settle down an' raise a fambly that would be a comfort to me in my old age—"

Sinful John threw back his head and bayed at the rising sun, and Toby, recognizing his mother tongue, promptly joined in the chorus. Snowshoe stood glaring at them and trembling with rage. And presently Sinful John took up the argument again.

"You putrified monkey, you," he said kindly. "You shore can't be mentally responsible for that outburst. It's due to what the feller calls see-nile decay. You say I've been a-leadin' you on. Well? Ain't I led you to as sweet a little placer proposition as was ever dreamed of by mortal man? And what thanks do I get? None whatever. Why, that Toby dog's got more hoo-man gratitood in his make-up than you, you danged old growlin' dyspeptic, you decrepit, hoary-headed sin-ner, you."

Sinful John had throttled the ungenerous impulse to take offense at Snowshoe's acidity and was doing his mightiest to establish the *entente cordiale* that had prevailed for thirty years. So he rambled on:

"An' so you ain't growin' old at all, eh, Snowshoe! You ancient, antediluvian old sweetheart! By Judas, I see it all now. You're moonstruck—just swelled up with pup-love until you're as big as a skinned horse. An' you ain't laid eyes on a white woman in eighteen months—" He paused and regarded Snowshoe sorrowfully. He had suddenly remembered that Snowshoe Sam had gone over into a little draw adjacent to the claim a few days before to cut some piñon pine timbers for the shaft. Upon his return he had reported a party of Washoe Indians encamped there, gathering piñon pine nuts. Could it be possible that this decadent Snowshoe even remotely planned an alliance with one of the leading American families? Sinful John felt again all the old apprehensions that had assailed him in Mojave twenty years ago.

"A-lookin' to trot in double harness ag'in, eh?" he demanded malevolently. "Well, I suppose there ain't no fool like an old fool when he gits started, and the only thing I hope is the lady in the case ain't a Washoe squaw. I want to warn you, Samuel, if you set to work,

now that you see a little money in sight, an' go to matin' up with the first female you meet, your old pardner ain't a-goin' to pay her no five hundred dollars to run away from you. No, sir-ee! I done that once, but hoss sense has come to me with the years, an' I've laid all that kind o' foolishness behind me."

Alas! In his lust for raillery, in his worthy and kindly desire to snatch Snowshoe Sam away from whatever blue devils harassed him, Sinful John had offered himself as a striking proof of the inroads of time. He had unclamped the lid from a buried past—forgotten that here was the one secret he had ever kept from his pardner, the one deceit he had ever practiced upon this poor weak Snowshoe Sam, who, in the mere shank of his old age had dared to show a weak repining for his vanished opportunities in the arena of love—a reprehensible yearning for the comforting presence of woman, now that the aches and tremors of age were upon him.

The words had scarcely been spoken before Sinful John realized he had made a fearful mistake. Snowshoe turned a quiet, tense face, with its stubbly growth of snowy beard, toward his old pardner and regarded him with deadly meditative calm. Sinful John's skin burned under that glance and he turned his head away, the while he pondered the wisdom of that ancient proverb touching the bliss that comes of ignorance. And while he was pondering it and reviling himself, Snowshoe spoke—kindly, wearily, as one who has labored long in a forlorn hope and now despairs, but without regret for his fruitless labors.

"Yes, you'd better turn your head away. I would, too, if I was you. An' so *you* was at the bottom o' my early onhappiness, eh? Well!" He paused and smiled a little bitterly before proceeding. "I'm just a little bit

grieved an' disapp'inted in you, Johnnie. Yes, John, even after all these years together, I find it hard to believe you acted so low. She was the wife o' my buzzam, Johnnie, an' you didn't have no right to interfere, an' maybe if you hadn't 'a' interfered, things would have been different. It takes time for two people to get used to each other's ways an' sorter set in the collar to pull together--an' you only give me two short weeks. No, sir, if any man but you was to have told me that story, I wouldn't 'a' believed him, an' what's more, John, I'd 'a' shot him in his tracks."

Inwardly lacerated, Sinful John nevertheless essayed a weak defiance, hoping to brazen it out, laugh it out, ridicule it out; anything to insure peace and balm to Snowshoe's wounded heart. He spoke lovingly.

"You scaly scoundrel! Why don't you shoot me?"

"You ain't wuth it, Johnnie."

"But she had a husband livin', Snowshoe. You was jumpin' a claim that'd already been staked--"

But Snowshoe only grinned a sad and sickly grin, as though to say: "That's a pretty feeble and particularly stupid lie to drag into the argument at this late date." He commenced putting away the cooking utensils and seemed inclined to end the argument. But honest Sinful's veracity had been questioned by that sneer and he meant to have it out and over with.

"Why don't you tell me I lie, then?" he shrilled.

"Never mind, John. We won't discuss it further," answered Snowshoe Sam. He had Sinful John by the short hair and meant to preserve his advantage.

"It's because you ain't got the nerve of a horned toad," raved Sinful John, and he was mighty angry now. Johnnie! First it had been Johnnie and now it was John, where for thirty years it had been Sinful or Jack. A curse upon this man Snowshoe and his air of injured

innocence. Like all elemental males in his predicament Sinful's first coherent desire was a passionate one to get drunk and forget his sorrows, and, the moment being propitious, the particular fiend whose duty it is to disrupt old friendships whispered to him of a bottle he had "hid out"—had hid out five months in fact, in case of accident or sickness or snake-bite, primarily, but in reality to celebrate Snowshoe's sixty-eighth birthday, which was now almost hourly impending.

He went to his private "war-bag" and obtained the bottle, tilted it on his head and drank, after which he did the meanest thing he could think of. *He returned the bottle to his war-bag.* He wanted to insult Snowshoe Sam because Snowshoe Sam had insulted him, so he drank alone, thus presenting the spectacle of a brutish selfishness, and succeeded better than he realized.

"He might 'a' offered me a snifter," reflected Snowshoe. He bethought himself suddenly of the ache in his hollow tooth—an ache which strong raw whisky would doubtless have stilled, at least temporarily, and a rush of self-pity brought a mistiness to his aged eyes.

"I guess you an' me've been pardners long enough, John," he said bravely when Sinful John returned to the fire.

"You can't slip the hitch too quick to suit me," retorted Sinful John, and turned faint at the dreadful pounding of his heart as the monstrous words slipped out.

"Them's — my — sentiments — ex-exactly," panted Snowshoe, and his voice was low and strained.

Silently and within half an hour they divided their worldly goods and chattels. They had four burros, so each took two. Then they weighed out their bullion and divided that, and—

"We'd better divide the whisky," said Sinful John, fair to the last, as he saw the light.

Snowshoe longed for a mouthful to deaden the throbbing nerve in his ruined tooth, but—

"I drink with my friends," he faltered—and scored a knockout!

Sinful John tossed the bottle from him and it crashed against a rock, and without another word they rounded up their burros and turned their backs on "as sweet a little placer proposition as mortal man ever dreamed of." They could not work it together and they could not work it apart. Therefore, they cast it away.

Snowshoe Sam struck off up the cañon, planning to cross the Toyabes and continue north, bound whither he knew not—nor cared—and Sinful John, peeling himself a piñon gad to harry his burros, headed down the cañon, bound out across the Big Smoky and south. Only Toby remained, seated on his hunkers on top of the dump, striving in his doglike way to fathom this mystery that had come upon him. First he turned to Snowshoe Sam, climbing the slope, and then he faced around toward Sinful John descending it. Their actions were totally incomprehensible, and the incongruity of the situation so racked Toby's understanding that presently he gave three short distinct barks of anxiety and disapproval.

It was then that the two pardners thought of Toby! Each turned quickly for a backward glance, then, apparently ashamed of such weakness they continued on. For they could not divide Toby! He had to choose for himself, and in common justice to each other they could not bid for him by word or sign.

For fully half an hour Toby sat on the gravel dump wondering. Then he appeared to have arrived at a conclusion, for he went scurrying up the cañon after Snowshoe Sam. Half-way up he changed his mind and fairly flew down the slope toward Sinful John, catching up

with that unhappy wretch just as the latter emerged into the hot, flat expanse of the Big Smoky.

Sinful John paused and gazed upon Toby, who frisked around him in a delirious canine delight.

Alas! Sinful John was that most cruel of all created creatures—a human being! He refused to harken to Toby's appeal or to make rhyme or reason out of Toby's short dashes up the cañon and back, his earnest wistful glances, his short suggestive barks or the frantic twitching of his ridiculous tail. There could be no reconciliation, and eventually Toby must have become convinced of this, for he came up to Sinful John and licked his hand as if craving forgiveness for what he was about to do.

Poor Sinful John, alone in the desert, marveled that Toby should argue with him alone! He felt a little guilty, but he fortified his courage with the reflection that Snowshoe was wrong and consequently it was not up to *him* to make the first advances. But when Toby came and licked his hand and showed so conclusively what he was about to do, Sinful John commenced to cry.

"Run along, Toby," he said between sobs; "you belong to Sam. He won you in a poker pot in Panamint a long time ago, an' he needs you worse'n I do."

He patted Toby's head and Toby rested his hot muzzle in Sinful's horny hand an instant before trotting sadly away up the cañon. He had argued with the stronger of his pardners and failed to convince him, so, doglike, he made his choice and cast his lot with the weaker. He was whimpering plaintively as he disappeared in the sage.

At Weeping Water, a waterhole in the Nevada desert, Sinful John three years later came to the end of

the Long Trail. Poor Sinful John. He was quite finished with prospecting now, for the years since he had parted with Snowshoe Sam in the Toyabes had not dealt kindly with him and he was a lonely, disheartened old man, with less than a thousand dollars in dust in his war-bags as the result of a lifetime of appalling endeavor. He camped that night at Weeping Water, and thus it happened that he found himself in the forefront of the rush to a new strike in the foothills of the Toquina Range, fifteen miles away.

The first news Sinful John had of the new strike was when a dozen automobiles, breaking trail through the sage, came chugging up to Weeping Water and halted to fill their boiling radiators. There were men in these automobiles who knew old Sinful John, and with the generosity of the young and the lusty they shouted to him the tidings of great joy, urging him to follow quickly and stake out a claim for himself. They said the values were unbelievably high. The desert rat who had gone through hell to find the gold had called his city-to-be Paradise. The men in the automobiles said Paradise would be another Goldfield.

Now, in the heyday of his youth, less tangible reports of a new strike would have caused Sinful John to tremble with the gambler's ague and sent him hurrying to the front to shoulder his way through the route of fortune hunters, but tonight the glad story fell on his consciousness with the deadly monotony of a dance-hall ballad too oft repeated. What were new strikes to him? He was seventy years old and nothing seemed to interest him any more since he and Snowshoe Sam had parted.

He stood among his burros beside the Weeping Water and watched the automobiles disappear into the hush of the night.

"They're crazy," mumbled Sinful John; "gold-crazy, every mother's son of 'em. All these rich strikes peter out. I never knew a boom camp yet that had a legit'mate basis o' values to back up her claims. An' they've named this new camp Paradise!" He snorted contemptuously. "An' the same old gang'll be there—new faces, maybe, but bred from the same old stock. An' they'll come past Weepin' Water durin' the rush in, an' when the camp busts they'll come hustlin' out the way they come in, because Weepin' Water's the only water on the trail in fifty miles—Yahoo!"

Sinful John had made his big strike at last, and his glad shout carried with it the riotous joy and triumph of generations of youth. The fools! Let them stake their claims in Paradise if they wanted to, but he, Sinful John, would play a lone hand and be banking the game at the finish. *He* would file on Weeping Water, more precious than all the gold in Paradise, and he would erect a little shack of a road-house beside the spring and sell liquor to the madmen who, perforce, must pass his door, first pausing to fill their stomachs and their radiators with the life that Weeping Water had to offer. But he would play the game fairly. He would not deny a drink of water in the desert to a stray burro, but if they would drink of the Weeping Water without charge, the men who stopped at Sinful John's road-house must prove their neighborly instincts by buying liquor at Sinful John's bar; otherwise water would be ten cents per gallon, and if the helpless customer howled at the extortion the price would leap to fifty cents a gallon instantly!

It was a lively rush—that one into Paradise. Probably five thousand gold seekers journeyed across that desert trail during the next three months, and all paused awhile at Weeping Water, where Sinful John charged

them well. Yet, for each drink that he sold, Sinful John, most generous of men, gave two away! Extravagance always was his besetting sin; otherwise he might have quit the game with five thousand dollars and this story would have fallen flat. However, he attended strictly to his business and drank nothing himself, for, ever since he and Snowshoe Sam had quarreled and parted, he had not cared to indulge himself in strong waters, for Sinful John had decided to give up the Trail, and was concerning himself chiefly with the problem of retiring with sufficient funds to enable him to seek some quiet country spot and end his days in peace.

He knew a place down in Inyo County, California, where the desert had been metamorphosed into a garden, and here it was that a thoughtful and prodigal ex-desert rat, who had cleaned up forty millions in a wonderful strike down Ludlow way, had established a home for retired prospectors and endowed it with the income from a million dollars. It was not a charitable institution, for well the donor knew the temper of the desert rat, who prefers death and starvation in the desert to charity at the hands of a lucky comrade. On the contrary, any prospector over fifty years of age had the privilege of purchasing a living in the home for the rest of his natural life upon the payment of two thousand dollars, and it was toward this haven of refuge that Sinful John's thoughts had been turning of late.

He knew that Inyo country well; it was beautiful and he loved it, and as the days passed and his old buckskin purse gradually filled up with gold, there stole over him a passionate longing for that glad day when he should turn the lock in his cabin door and leave Weeping Water forever, bound down through the White Mountains to peace and rest at last in Inyo. He hoped

Paradise would not peter out until he had cleaned up at least three thousand dollars—two thousand for the Home and the remainder for spending money. He would require such little extras as tobacco and grog, which the Prospectors' Home did not furnish.

But Paradise disappointed him to a certain extent. It was a repetition of the same old story. The rush in had no sooner ceased than the outward hegira commenced. Funds were not plentiful with the outward bound, but nevertheless Sinful John managed to do some business. He could almost gage the dwindling population of Paradise by his own daily receipts!

But few of the faithful still grubbed and coyoted in Paradise six months after Sinful John squatted at Weeping Water. He was catering to the thirst of less than a dozen customers daily now, but still he hung on, hoping against hope for a strike in the dying camp that would bring the resurgent tides of fortune sweeping past his door again. But nothing happened and in the eighth month of his vigil came a time when bedrock was reached. Not a soul passed along the trail to Weeping Water for four days. Then two men came across the desert in a motor truck and explained to Sinful John that they were bound for Paradise to bring out a safe and some office furniture for the express company, which had closed its affairs in that ruined metropolis.

Sinful John gave them of his water and his whisky, and when they had jolted away along the trail to Paradise, he brought a chair out on his little front porch and sat there in the cool throughout the afternoon.

Presently he rose and, shading his eyes with his horny hand, gazed across the desert to where the white trail lost itself in the pass through the Toquinas over Paradise way. In the plain at the mouth of the pass a

little white dot was moving slowly toward the Weeping Water; a little fleecy cloud of alkali dust gleamed sharp against the blue of the distant Toquinas.

"Twenty-five hundred even, in the old buckskin purse," mused Sinful John. "It ain't quite enough, but it will do. I'll light out of Weeping Water when that there automobile truck passes on the return trip, for here comes my last customer. I'll liquor this pilgrim up and then lock the door on the shebang an' fade for Inyo."

From the time when he first came into the range of Sinful John's vision until he turned in at the watering trough, the approach of the last man in Paradise held a strange fascination for the old prospector. It was the stranger's gait that puzzled him. He was what is known as "a step-and-a-half man," and when he paused beside his burro at the trough while the animal drank, Sinful John realized why this was so. The man from Paradise was old, and at no very distant date he had had his right leg broken in two places—above and below the knee—and because the shattered bones had been improperly set (the rude surgical work, possibly, of a fellow prospector) the old leg had twisted and warped like an ox-bow. Also it was fully three inches shorter than its fellow, in consequence of which, when the man stood erect, he was pitifully lopsided, and when he walked he leaned over and pressed his right hand over his knee, as if the bones were loose and still hurt him. Thus, favoring the injured leg, he progressed in a series of dreadful hops toward Sinful John, awaiting his pleasure on the porch.

"Howdy, pardner," called Sinful John cheerily.

The cripple from Paradise stopped short and a glad smile lighted up his ancient, bewhiskered countenance.

"Sinful," he quavered and held out his trembling

old arms. "Sinful, you *air* a-goin' to speak to me, ain't you?"

It was Snowshoe Sam! Through the ruin of the years Sinful John recognized in the step-and-a-half man the old lost pardner of his youth, and he rose and stared unbelievably, while a terrible sorrow enveloped him and tugged at his heart-strings.

"But you called me 'pardner,' " protested Snowshoe, in thin senile tones. He had misinterpreted Sinful's stare of unbelief for one of hostility.

"Snowshoe," yelled Sinful John, and then the rich, unctuous curses commenced rolling off his agile tongue. And howling the old litany of his deathless friendship he descended upon the doddering human fragment before him and folded the pitiful figure to his great breast, as a father folds a wayward son. For a moment thus he held him, and then the loving cuss-words choked in his throat and silence reigned at Weeping Water—for Weeping Water at last was aptly named!

Snowshoe Sam was the first to recover his poise. He shoved Sinful John away from him roughly and gave him a feeble punch in the ribs.

"You whisky-peddlin' disgrace to a honored profession! Ain't you got no word o' welcome for Toby, an' him jest a-waitin' an' a-whimperin' to be recognized?"

"An' old Toby dog, too," shouted Sinful John. "By Judas, if this ain't the happiest day o' my doggone life I'll—"

He stooped and patted Toby's head with one hand and extended the other for Toby's lingual caresses. "The old pup's changed, ain't he?" he added. "He's moultin'."

Toby was, indeed, changed. He was an old dog now—fourteen years at least, and with mange and age

his hair had departed. The saucy tassel that had crowned his audacious tail was scattered over the fair state of Nevada, and naught but the bare blue stump remained. He was seminaked and most disreputable-looking. His eyes were rheumy and he staggered a little in his hind quarters when he walked. Snowshoe explained—the pitiful tragedy of youth betrayed.

“Too much canned goods, Sinful, an’ not enough fresh meat. Pore Toby ain’t et a jack-rabbit in a year. I’ve got so I ain’t able to shoot straight no more for him, an’ he ain’t able to ketch no game for himself.”

“Come in, old pardner,” entreated Sinful John huskily.

They went inside and after the fashion of their kind they drank.

“First drink in three years,” said Snowshoe Sam.

“Same here,” replied Sinful John.

And that was all of their apology and explanation. They were men of few words, with the capacity for feeling and understanding much, so they took up their friendship where it had left off, nor mention made of the time and sorrow between.

Snowshoe Sam camped that night with his pardner at Weeping Water, and after supper they sat at the table, with a bottle between them, and played cribbage as they had so often played it by the flickering light of a thousand camp-fires in the twilight of the long ago, while Toby lay under the table, twitching his ridiculous tail.

“Well, Snowshoe,” announced Sinful John presently, “you happened along in the nick o’ time. I was goin’ to turn the lock in the door in a day or two an’ get out o’ business.”

“Goin’ to retire on your ill-gotten gains, eh, you bloody ’ristocrat?”

"That's about the ticket, Snowshoe, old chuckwalla."

"I heerd you was doin' a big business here an' git-in' rich, Sinful, but o' course, now that Paradise has gone bust you got to light out. But you made your pile before she busted, eh, you thievin' side-winder? If I had your head for business I—" Snowshoe Sam paused to sigh before continuing. "You aimin' to go prospectin' agin, Sinful?"

"Naturally," lied Sinful John blithely. "What'd you expect I was a-goin' to do? Lay in bed an' read the papers? We'll go back to that placer claim in the Toyabes now an' take up work on the old shaft."

But Snowshoe Sam shook his palsied head emphatically. "Not for me, Sinful. Paradise used me up an' I'm all finished. I—I would'nt be no good for a pardner nohow, Sinful, an' I ain't the kind to sponge off'n nobody. You might 'a' noticed I busted my laig."

"The hell you did," cried Sinful incredulously. "You don't say? I s'pose it was your own fault. You was always a careless sort o' cuss around a mine."

"Drove my pick into an old shot an' it lifted me. I was laid up in Paradise seven months an' the durned leg healed crooked. That's why I was the last man to leave that rotten camp. If I'd 'a' had sound footin' I'd 'a' dusted out o' there months ago."

"Sho, sho, now," said Sinful John. Then: "What was you aimin' to do, Snowshoe?"

Snowshoe looked across the table at the partner of his youth. "I thought, Jack," he said, "now that you're plumb swelled up with money, you might buy out my half-interest in the old placer claim in the Toyabes. I went back last Christmas—hopin' maybe I'd find you there a-waitin' for me—an' I restaked the claim for both of us an' did the assessment work, an' the title's clear to midnight o' December thirty-first next."

"I'll do that," replied Sinful John cheerfully. "What d'ye reckon your half's worth? Don't you go namin' no fancy prices, now, you skunk, because I won't pay 'em. I'll give you," he continued, and pondered; "I'll give you just twenty-five hundred dollars an' not a doggone cent more."

Snowshoe's face lit up like the crest of the Funeral Range at dawn. He pounded the table with his left hand and stuck out his right to Sinful John to seal the bargain.

"Sold," he cackled, "sold!"

"I suppose so," taunted Sinful John, and pegged fifteen two.

"It's all the money I'll need," Snowshoe rambled on, paying no attention to the game. "You know what I'm a-goin' to do, Sinful? I'm a-goin' to retire to that there Prospectors' Home down in Inyo. I can get in for two thousand an' no more worries for the rest o' my days, an' the five hundred extra will keep me in tobacco an' a bottle now an' then. I tell you, Sinful, that offer o' yourn to buy out my share makes it pretty easy for me in my declinin' years."

"Shut up, you chatterin' magpie, an' play the game," growled Sinful John.

Ah, how well he was playing the game! Only poor, hopeless, crippled old Snowshoe would never, never know, and to the end of his days would be bragging to his cronies at the Prospectors' Home how he had sold a fortune for a paltry twenty-five hundred dollars!

Snowshoe Sam, with Sinful John's twenty-five hundred dollars packed in his canvas war-bag, left on the return trip of the auto truck next day. His parting with Sinful John was not demonstrative. They merely shook hands and said, "So long." Then Sinful John was

standing alone in the trail, watching the auto truck until it dipped below the skyline and disappeared. Whereupon he grinned a little painfully and addressed himself to Toby.

"There he goes, Toby. There goes old Snowshoe, the only pardner we ever had, an' we ain't a-goin' to see him no more, because he's cleaned us for the last grub-stake an' we can't show up no more an' let him know! But he was entitled to it, Toby. He was our old pardner an' the first to quit, weren't he, Toby?"

He was silent for a long time, the while his mind groped for a solution of the problem that confronted him. Should he pack Snowshoe's old white burro and take the Long Trail again, to die at last, alone, unattended, unwept, like a sick jack-rabbit beneath a bush, but a true desert rat and game to the finish? Or should he take his old six-shooter and end it now? Truly it was a perplexing problem, but Sinful John, ever the strongest link in the trinity, was too brave to face a coward's death. He was old and hopeless and penniless, and to such as he Death seems ever close at hand and very welcome. Therefore, Sinful John resolved to walk to meet it.

"Come, Toby," he murmured, "we'll round up Snowshoe's jack an' head out o' Weepin' Water," and with the old dog trotting stiffly at his side he walked out to where Snowshoe's abandoned burro cropped the scant grasses under the sage. A long rope trailed from the animal's halter along the ground, and presently Sinful John reached for this rope, unmindful of a dry, buzzing rattle. Poor old Sinful John! He had lived his threescore and ten years and his eyes were dim and his eardrums shriveled. Even Toby failed to sense the hereditary enemy, for Toby, too, was old and his sense of smell was gone with his hair.

So Sinful John laid his hand on the trailing rope and from the roots of a sage bush a foot away the reptile struck.

"Sho," said Sinful John, and jerked himself erect just as Toby, having seen the rattlesnake launch its fetid folds upon his pardner, threw to the winds his fourteen years of accumulated canine caution. Sinful John had been attacked, and with a quick scuttering rush Toby closed his stump-lined jaws around the snake and shook him. The snake twisted and sank its fangs in Toby's lower lip; there was a gurgling snarl and a half whimper, and Toby shook the snake loose and tossed him, broken-backed, a dozen feet away. Then he faced Sinful John smiling and awaited his commendation.

But Sinful John was looking at the back of his right hand, where two little pin-pricks exuded tiny drops of blood. Presently he glanced down at Toby and noticed that the dog also sported two similar drops on his hairless upper lip.

"Well, this settles the question, Toby," he said, "an' I'm mighty glad of it. I ketched the full charge from the critter an' you got the second dose, which ain't half as bad, but enough for you, Toby, enough for you! Well, it's better'n starvin' to death or beggin' from camp to camp, an' we won't kick, Toby. Not us. We'll just take the rope off this jackass so he won't get snagged in the sage an' starve to death, an' then me an' you, Toby'll, just go back to the shack an' lie down an' die like a pair o' dead game sports."

Toby whisked his naked tail, proving that he was agreeable, and after attending to the burro they returned to the house. By that time Toby's lip had swollen comically and Sinful's hand had turned black. He had shooting pains up to his shoulder.

"Toby," he said, "me an' you've lived a long an' happy life, an' now that we've 'tended to all our affairs, we can cash in our chips an' set back from the game without whinin' about our luck. Our luck's been *good*, Toby. It's held right to the finish, an' me an' you're the luckiest dogs I know of. We don't have to blow our lights ourselves, Toby. No, sir. We're a-passin' on by reason o' circumstances over which we ain't got no control nohow, an' we go beholdin' to no man. Toby, it's a good *hombre* that can live his life an' have that to say for himself at the finish."

He helped himself to a long drink of whisky.

"You bein' a dog, Toby," he continued, wiping his whiskers, "naturally you die the death of a dog. You're due to last about three hours, on account o' gettin' a light dose, but me—I'll be gone in an hour. Too old, Toby—too old to fight it off; so what's the use o' tryin'? One hour more, Toby, an' as the sky-pilots say, I shall have went hence an' passed on before," and Sinful John, the weakest pardner at last, lay back on his bunk. Toby smiled at him and whisked his tail. An hour later he commenced to whimper, for the angels had come for Sinful John and Toby was alone.

Along toward sunset Toby's grotesque tail had ceased from a lifetime of triumphant twitching. He was stretched across Sinful John's feet as if, before he followed, he had found them cold.

Salt of the Earth

ALL this happened a long time ago, when Sinful John, Snowshoe Sam and their joint property, a yellow dog named Toby, roamed the desert country of the Far Western states and found life sweet and wholesome, though a trifle uncertain. All three partners have long since reached the end of the rainbow and will come no more to Kelcey's Wells in the fall of the year for "a time"; nevertheless, their memory is still fresh and green among the survivors of the old boom camps. And it was from such a one I had this tale of a crime accomplished in the name of charity, gratitude, and elemental justice—a crime the record of which surely must have been erased from the Book of Life when the Recording Angel dropped a mirthful tear upon the entry and neutralized the ink.

Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam, as has been explained elsewhere in the chronicles of their wanderings, were prospectors who had followed the lure too long, with the result that, though they did not know it, the gold they sought had become a secondary consideration. What they really wanted—in fact what they had to have—was the silence of the desert; sunrise and sunset; saw-toothed mountain and lava scarp; the scent of the sage at dawn; and wood smoke and the odor of frying bacon in their eager nostrils at eventide.

With no false conventions to respect; with defeat behind them and victory ever in front beckoning them

on; possessed of immunity from the competition of life and calm in their knowledge that Mother Earth would yield from her treasures sufficient for their modest needs—Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam journeyed blithely on to the finish—for theirs was a simple code, embraced in three commandments, partly orthodox and partly natural, to wit: Thou shalt not kill—unnecessarily. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not be small of heart and mean of soul. Thus fortified spiritually, they found in their primitive life an elemental peace that can be understood only by those who have walked through the purple haze into the silence.

In the beginning, of course, Sinful and Snowshoe had regular names, like other folk, but lost them early in life; and, finding them of no particular value, never insisted on replacing them. As Snowshoe once remarked, his name was useful only when attached to a location notice; and, inasmuch as he and Sinful were in the habit of posting such notices in singularly out-of-the-way places, the opportunities for advertising their identity were negligible, to say the least—a condition which Mr. Brandon P. Hyde, of Wall Street, New York City, found furiously disconcerting when, following the expenditure of nearly ten thousand dollars in an effort to discover and apprehend the scoundrels who had sold him the Sweepstake Mine, the national detective agency he employed reported the trail irrevocably lost.

However, if Mr. Hyde will go to Weeping Water, on the trail to the old forgotten camp of Paradise, he will find one of the culprits. Sinful John and Toby sleep in the sage there under the same blanket, and a wooden cross marks their last dry camp. To the cross is nailed the end of a cracker box, and carved thereon with a jack-knife is the legend:

HERE LIE SINFUL JOHN AND HIS
CUR DOG TOBY
THEIR BARK WAS WORSE THAN THEIR BITE

Here the record of Sinful John ends. As for Snowshoe Sam, he died in the Prospectors' Home down Inyo way, and lies in the local cemetery, disgraced for aye by a neat tombstone bearing the devilish announcement that here lie the mortal remains of Elmer Sampson Postelwaithe. It is to be feared that Snowshoe was forced to reveal his disgrace, when he bought his living in the Home, in order that the demands of red tape might be complied with.

For more than two years Sinful John, Snowshoe Sam, and Toby had been attending strictly to business, dry-washing gold in some surface placer claims in that choice bit of second-class Purgatory known as Big Smoky Valley. During that period they had not been once to civilization together, Sinful John having abruptly sickened of the shams and foibles of society and declared his weariness of Snowshoe's habit of hell-ing round and getting nowhere. Sinful was all for saving the firm's capital until a sufficient stake had been gathered, whereupon they would "take in" the Paris Exposition. He had heard tales of the delightful wickedness of gay Paree, but was desirous of ocular evidence before believing.

Nevertheless, such a picture of joy unconfined did he paint that Snowshoe's alert imagination was roused, and they had set forth with Toby and the jacks, and plenty of grub and powder, to seek a healthy road stake wherever fortune might be lurking in the mineralized sections of North America. In Big Smoky they located the dry diggings; with a dry-washing apparatus of their own invention and construction, plus the

high hopes that had always sustained them, they had spent two years dry-washing the gravel down to the bed-rock, and at the time our story opens the partners were possessed of eighteen thousand dollars in coarse gold dust and a tremendous yearning for the flesh-pots.

Came a day when Snowshoe Sam straightened up from his task of shoveling the gravel into the dry-washer. Ostensibly he was about to spit on his hands. Instead, he tilted back his hat, ran the toil-worn fingers of his right hand through his thick gray foretop, and sighed. Sinful John heard the sigh, caught the yearning look in Snowshoe's eyes—and understood perfectly. In the desert men do not speak unless they have to, for speech shatters the silence, which is like a benediction.

Moreover, after one has adjusted oneself to the silence, speech is not vitally necessary; and this was so with Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam. After twenty years of partnership, telepathy had taken the place of the spoken word; so now Sinful looked sternly at Snowshoe and shook his head negatively. Resignedly Snowshoe replaced his hat, spat on his hands, took a fresh firm grasp of the shovel handle, thrust the lip of the implement into the face of the gravel, changed his mind, and faced round on Sinful, who swore dreadfully at him.

"How many times have I got to tell you, Snowshoe, that I ain't a-goin' to leave these diggin's until the scales tell us we've got twenty thousand in the poke? I'm tellin' you, you"—here Sinful essayed a flight of the language peculiarly his own, returning, after ten seconds, to the original subject—"that a trip to the Patee Exposition is danged expensive, an' I don't aim to go there an' miss a lot o' fun just because I didn't come properly heeled. Now you quit this vain repinin' an' git to shovelin' gravel, or the first thing we know

the exposition'll be over before we've dry-washed our limit."

"Oh, to hell with the Paree Exposition!" Snowshoe shrilled in sudden, unreasonable rage. "I'm sick an' tired talkin' about it; an' I'm layin' you five to one Paree ain't what she's cracked up to be, no-how. Me—I can have a pretty good time over to Kelcey's Wells."

"That's becuz you're just plumb low an' ordinary by nature," Sinful growled. "Snowshoe, you ain't got a speck o' art in that rabbit soul o' yourn. You ain't got no more culture than a sage-hen. Don't you never figger there's somethin' else in life besides goin' to town to git drunk?"

"Don't you never figger there's somethin' else in life besides meltin' away in the middle o' Big Smoky, dry-washin' this hell-fired gravel?" Snowshoe retorted.

"We got a good thing, you parasite!"

"A feller can git tired o' too much of a good thing."

There was profound philosophy in this latter statement, and Sinful knew it. He was silent, pondering; whereat Snowshoe pursued his advantage:

"We're about out o' matches an' plumb out o' airtights, an' it does seem as if Toby'd ought to have a can o' flea powder."

Sinful John banged his fist on the dry-washer. "Dang you, Snowshoe," he protested, "you're a-gittin' town hungry."

Snowshoe admitted it. "'All work an' no play makes a dull boy o' Jack,' they say," he quoted.

"It's my turn to go out," Sinful John reminded him with considerable asperity and profanity.

"I thought mebbe me an' Toby might fix to go 'long with you," Snowshoe suggested mildly.

This was rank heresy, for Snowshoe knew their weakness quite as well as did Sinful. According to their code, neither could "go on a bender" without the company of the other. That would have been unspeakable. Consequently, following the principle of "safety first," for the past two years they had taken turns at going out for supplies; and, as a result of this precaution, the gilded palaces of sin in Kelcey's Wells had not fattened on the toil of the partners.

Sinful John, figuratively speaking, went up in the air. When he came down again he knew that Snowshoe was unimpressed. He could tell that from the dogged manner in which Snowshoe looked at him. So Sinful surrendered.

"All right!" he announced. "I ain't aimin' to make a dull boy o' you, Snowshoe, because I ain't anxious to tackle the impossible. Nature give you a head like a porcelain door-knob long before I met up with you. Now listen, you ornery, quittin', no-good son of a horse thief: I've took a vow not to tread the primrose path, as the feller says, until me an' you've got twenty thousand dollars to tread it with. I ain't longin' none for sassiety—not even your'n. From now until the day me an' you lights in Paree an' starts hikin' up the Rue de la Pakes or the Champs Ulysses—take it from me, Snowshoe—I'm pure. I know you're—"

"I been a he-angel for two year," Snowshoe complained bitterly.

"Seein' which, it sorter looks as if you might stick it out three months longer," Sinful reminded him.

"But we got to have grub."

"Well, you go out tomorrow mornin' an' git it. I'll give you dust enough to buy everything we need—an' you see that you buy it. Tend to all your business first—an' then take a week off an' do your hell-raisin'.

Five hundred ought to give you all the joy a man o' your age can stand."

"There ain't no fun if I go alone," the prodigal protested.

"You go alone an' you have your little splash an' git it over with," Sinful thundered. "I'm excusin' you this time. I won't be jealous, nohow. All your life, Snowshoe, you've been a weak vessel; so I reckon the time has come when you've just got to let off steam or bust. I'm plumb weary listenin' to your protests an' whinin'; an' if I got to look forward to three months more o' bellyachin' I might as well set on a stick o' dynamite, light the fuse an' go to glory. At least I'll have peace then—an' peace is my long suit. Tomorrow mornin'—"

"But, Sinful—"

"Don't interrupt me. I'm talkin'. You'll leave here light, takin' two jacks an' ridin' t'other. I'll give you four days to git to Kelcey's Wells; one day to rest up; one day to tend to business; six days to raise hell; two to take a brace on yourself; an' four days to git back to camp. That's eighteen days."

"I'll bring you back a coupler quarts o' liquor," Snowshoe suggested.

"Wa-al, I suppose we ought to have some round—in case o' snake bite," Sinful admitted grudgingly. "Not that I'm a-hankerin' for the danged stuff."

Snowshoe nodded his comprehension and once more the gravel commenced to drop into the dry-washer. Early the following morning he took the jacks, bade Sinful a perfunctory "So long!" and headed out across Big Smoky. Sinful watched him until he disappeared in the sea of sage; then he sat down, while Toby came and laid his cool muzzle in his master's hand. "Toby," quoth Sinful John presently, "this here doggoned

Snowshoe would sure have been a fizzle as a Christian martyr, wouldn't he?"

Toby made a queer yawning little noise in his throat, wagged his stubby tail, licked Sinful's hand, looked understandingly at him, and thence out into the sage that had swallowed Snowshoe Sam. Sinful John nodded.

"I reckon you'd better go along, too, Toby, an' sorter look after the cuss," he suggested.

Toby trotted away on Snowshoe's trail.

Late in the afternoon of the sixth day following Snowshoe Sam's departure for Kelcey's Wells, Sinful John, gazing out across Big Smoky, was aware of a tiny cloud of alkali dust coming toward him. While he was still wondering whether the dust was stirred up by a jack rabbit or a coyote, Toby burst from the sage and trotted panting to his other master. His tongue was hot and dry, and hung sideways out of his open mouth, round the fringes of which the slaver had long since dried. As he caught sight of Sinful he tried to bark his joy at the meeting, but made a dismal failure of it; he could only lean up against Sinful's shins and make queer rattling noises in his throat.

"Well, Toby-boy, you just did make it, didn't you?" Sinful John greeted the dog. "The desert a'mos' got you this time, didn't it? Toby, where's Snowshoe?"

He carried Toby into the tent and poured some water for him. In about five minutes he gave the parched dog some more, after which he bathed him and plastered Toby's sore pads with a healing unguent that was always kept in the kyacks in case the pack-saddles should gall the jacks. Utterly exhausted, Toby fell asleep, while Sinful prepared a meal for him. After Toby had eaten he fell asleep again. At midnight Sinful John woke him up.

"Come, Toby-boy," he said, "we've got to get out an' shake a leg; an' it's up to you to lead me to Snowshoe. You've had your rest, Toby. If you hadn't been plumb beat out when you got here I'd 'a' started then. I've got two canteens an' some grub, Toby. Let's hit the trail an' hit it fast."

As they passed out into the moonlight Sinful John was weeping, for he knew Snowshoe was in trouble. The jacks had stampeded, doubtless; the water had given out; and even now Snowshoe was dying—perhaps dead—on the trail. Toby would not have deserted him except as a last resort. It was terrible!

"Oh, pardner!" murmured Sinful John—and this time he did not swear.

Toby trotted on ahead, paused, and looked back expectantly; whereat, to test him, Sinful John turned and pretended to go back to camp. Toby barked protestingly, ran after him, circled round him, and once, in desperation, pretended to bite Sinful's ankle. "I guess I can trust you, Toby," Sinful addressed the dog affectionately. "Lead on, pup!"

And Toby led on. Thus, in time they came to Kelcey's Wells, and at the very first saloon on the fringe of the camp Sinful John paused; a procedure Toby took small stock in apparently, for he trotted on, paused, looked back, barked once briefly and sharply, saw that he was making no impression on Sinful John, and forthwith sat down on his hunkers to scratch fleas and think it over. He did not know that Sinful, being wise in his day and generation, would have bet anybody a twenty-dollar sombrero to a chew of tobacco that in this first saloon he would glean news of the missing Snowshoe. And he was not disappointed.

"Snowshoe?" the barkeeper repeated. "Why, yes; I reckon I can tell you about him, Sinful. What's your pleasure?" And he set out a bottle and a glass.

"Then tell me about him; an' be quick about it," Sinful answered with deadly calm, and shoved the temptation away from him. "Where's my pardner?"

"Why, Snowshoe's in the Railroad Hospital."

"Who put him there?"

Unconsciously Sinful John's hand strayed to the old blue forty-five at his hip. Snowshoe's quarrels were his quarrels too; the enemy of one must needs kill both if he would survive.

"Old Man Pneumony, Sinful. Snowshoe just did make the camp, I guess. One o' the boys found him wanderin' up Main Street, drier'n a covered bridge an' talkin' to himself; somebody called Doc Bleeker, an' the doc took his pulse an' temperature, an' had him sent down to the Railroad Hospital. Word come up that Snowshoe had pneumony o' the lungs, an' Doc Bleeker says he ain't got a chance."

"Why ain't he got a chance?" Sinful demanded fiercely.

"Well, principally on account o' all the liquor he's drunk in his day—so Doc Bleeker says."

"He'll pull through," Sinful declared with conviction. "I know Snowshoe from soul to guts. Besides, he ain't had a drink o' liquor in two years."

"That there dog followed him to the hospital," the barkeeper continued. "But they wouldn't let him in; so he hung round all o' one day an' night, an' then lit out."

"He come for me." The door banged and Sinful John was gone.

The instant Sinful John emerged from the saloon Toby rose and trotted confidently ahead; nor did he pause once until he came to the Railroad Hospital, which the T. & G. maintained at this terminus of its line. It was a small frame shack, presided over by a superannuated doctor and two trained nurses. Arrived

before the half-screen door, Toby promptly reared himself on his hind legs and looked in; then he scratched the screen vigorously with his fore-paws and uttered a propitiatory bark; which peremptory summons had the effect of bringing to the door the nurse on duty. She was a sweet-faced girl of twenty-two or twenty-three, and to weary, alkali-laden old Sinful John she appeared, in her freshly starched uniform, as sweet as a royal flush.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come!" she declared. "You're Sinful, aren't you?"

Sinful removed his hat, held it to his breast and looked at her. There was fright in the fine old eyes. He bowed low.

"I be," he said huskily.

"Snowshoe said you'd come. He said Toby would go back alone, and then you'd know something had happened and come looking for him."

"Is he—dead, young lady?"

"No; he isn't even going to die. The crisis is past now. He'll be himself in a couple of weeks."

Sinful John's chin ceased to quiver; his mouth set in hard lines.

"Might I see the wuthless cuss?" he queried.

The nurse nodded smilingly and led Sinful John into the tiny ward where Snowshoe, with a clean white nightgown on him, lay apparently asleep. At the sound of the door opening his eyes opened; he gazed severely at Sinful John.

"Well," he piped thinly, "what in blue blazes did you come here for, Sinful?"

"To be handed the disapp'intment o' my life when I find you're alive," Sinful roared angrily. "You old, white-whiskered, toothless, chatterin' child o' misfortune, where'd you git that there nightgown?"

"It tickles me," Snowshoe complained.

Doubtless it did; for Snowshoe had been sleeping in his shirt, or fully dressed, the greater portion of his life.

"I hope it kills you, you—you—"

"Ladies present," cried Snowshoe warningly.

The door was pressed gently open again and a fuzzy nose was poked into the room; a bright eye appraised the vision in the bed and a short bark from Toby greeted the lost partner e'er the proprietor of that bark dashed madly into the room, leaped up on the bed and licked Snowshoe's face. The nurse, being a discreet young woman, knew Sinful John had things to say to Snowshoe; so she withdrew, leaving the partners together.

At eight o'clock that night, when she came in to announce to Sinful John that he must terminate his visit in accordance with the rules of the hospital, she found the light turned out. So she lit it again, and beheld at the foot of Snowshoe's bed a pair of miner's boots, and hanging to Snowshoe's bedpost a cartridge belt and a long gun in a holster. On the floor, beside the bed, Sinful John lay stretched, sound asleep; on the bed with Snowshoe, filling it with fleas, Toby lay, with his muzzle in Snowshoe's hand. The nurse, who had been on the desert long enough to know its children, covered Sinful John with a spare blanket and left the partners alone together.

"Sinful," Snowshoe Sam declared solemnly, the day the former called to take him away from the hospital, "I've had a durned narrer squeak. I'm tellin' you that if it wasn't for that there nuss you'd be goin' to Paree alone."

"So?" said Sinful John.

Fell a silence, broken presently by Snowshoe.

"No," he declared emphatically; "she ain't that kind. She's a lady. We can't give her no new dress or bunnit same as we would a Washoe squaw."

"How d'ye know she wouldn't like a new dress or a bunnit? Besides, I was thinkin' of a silk dress."

"Sinful, there's times when you don't show good sense. If she wears a silk dress in a camp like this, right off folks'll think she's a dance-hall gal."

"Wa-al, then, seein' as how you're so danged up on etiquette, suppose you suggest somethin'."

"What do you suggest, Sinful?"

"I don't suggest nothin'. I'm askin' you to suggest it; an' I don't give a durn what it is—provided it's right. We've just nacherly got to show our appreciation, an' there ain't a thing I hate worse than bein' a short sport when it comes to showin' appreciation. Of course we pay the railroad people for your hospital expenses an' they pay that gal what they think she's worth; but then—hell's bells!—the railroad company never gits sick with pneumony o' the lungs, so how can they know what that gal's really entitled to draw down?"

"Them's my sentiments, Sinful. I'm tellin' you that young woman ain't content with doin' what the doctor tells her to do; she goes further. Sinful, I'm tellin' you! I can't grunt at night without she's up an' awake, an' wantin' to know how about me. I can't even think I'm thirsty but she knows it before I do. Just about the time them bedsheets an' the nightgown has me driven to distraction, she's givin' me an alcohol rub to cool me off. She puts ice on my head; she curries my hair an' whiskers; she feeds Toby; she frisks me an' finds my poke an' puts it away in the safe; she goes uptown an' gets a feller to care for the jacks until you come. Sinful, every which way you figger her, that girl

is allers up an' doin'. She reads to me. When I'm out o' my head an' cussin' somethin' scandalous, she ain't scandalized none. An' on top of it all, she makes me up a lot of fancy grub an' cooks it herself. An' if that ain't a hand hard to beat I'm a Chinaman!"

"Them's the things money can't pay for," Sinful John declared with conviction. "Whatever makes her take such an interest in you, Snowshoe?"

"That's what I says to her myself, Sinful. Which she 'lows as how her daddy was a prospector; in consequence of which she takes a special interest in the breed. Her name's Kincaid—Marjorie Kincaid. We both knowed her old man—Pyrites Kincaid. He was a big, dark-complected man; an' me an' him had an argyment once in Ballarat."

"Which it's just the mercy o' hell you don't kill Pyrites that time," Sinful declared. "He pulls first an' cuts down on you—an' his gun's emptier'n a banker's heart! I ain't never forgot the look that come in his eyes then; an' I ain't never forgot how you takes off your hat an' bows to him. 'Pyrites,' you says to him, 'I'm a-goin' to make you my debtor the longest day you live. Permit me to present you with your wuthless life.' An' then you shoves back your gun an' invites all hands to step up an' liquidate."

"We was young an' generous in them days," sighed Snowshoe.

"Which it's well we was, pardner. An', seein' as how Pyrites lived to father this here nuss, I'm a-layin' you ten to one he's paid his debt." Snowshoe nodded and Sinful went on: "Whatever become o' Pyrites Kincaid? Did the gal tell you, Snowshoe?"

"Why, yes. He hits the pay in Panamint, drops his roll, an' finds it again in Cinnabar. Then a swindling, sneakin' son of a hoss thief, by the name o' Brandon P.

Hyde relieves him of his million in a placer proposition down in Mexico; an' after that Pyrites don't seem quite able to come back. He loses his sperrit after he discovers there ain't no more pay in that ground than there be in Toby's whiskers."

"Salt?" queried Sinful John.

"Salt a-plenty."

"I don't rightly see how this man Hyde managed to salt the property on an old-timer like Pyrites. He ought to have guarded agin saltin'."

"Which he did; but Hyde was too slick for him. Him an' Pyrites went down to the property together; and, of course, Pyrites being worth a million dollars, it stands to reason he don't do the pannin' himself. An' he's too confident of his own judgment to hire an engineer. So Hyde has a passel o' Mexicans doin' the pannin'; an' all the time they're doin' it they're smokin' cigarettes, which the same cigarettes contain mebbe a dollar's worth of gold-dust, run in with the tobacco. Nacherly when the ashes fall off the ends o' the cigarette they falls into the pan, an' Pyrites finds dirt that runs from four bits to a dollar a pan. So he buys the property for a million dollars, puts in his machinery an' ditches, washes for a month, an' shuts down to make his first clean-up. Sinful, that gal tells me he don' git gold enough to fill a tooth!

"Hyde is in Yurru by this time; so Pyrites can't git close enough to the skunk to kill him. Also, Pyrites don't squeal none—part from pride an' part because he's a dead-game sport. He just packs his jacks an' heads up into the Harqua Halas, lookin' for another stake, which he never finds; an' finally somethin' goes wrong with his innards an' he sets back from the game. His widder runs a miners' boardin' house an' manages to give this here gal Marjorie her schoolin' an' make

a trained nuss out o' her; after which maw cashes in too—an' the gal's an orphan."

Sinful John was silent a long time, pondering this tragic tale. Finally he asked:

"An' this feller Hyde? Is he still in Yurrupe? Because if he is we'll just nacherly look that varmint up an' argy the case with him when we go to the Paree Exposition."

"No," replied Snowshoe, "he ain't. He's a-livin' in New York, an' he's what you-all call a banker and broker. That million he took from Pyrites Kincaid give him his start; an' Marjorie tells me as how she read all about him in the papers. I reckon mebbe that skunk's worth twenty million dollars by now."

Again Sinful John lapsed into silence. After a long time Snowshoe Sam queried: "I'm agreeable, Sinful. How d'ye propose takin' that million away from him?"

Not a word had been spoken, yet Snowshoe read his partner's thoughts as accurately as if Sinful had shouted them.

"Tomorrer mornin'," Sinful declared calmly, "I'm a-goin' to take two o' the jacks an' go back to the dry diggin's, dig up that eighteen thousand dollars in dust we got buried there, an' light out for Battle Mountain, to connect with the overland train. When I git there I'll cash in enough dust to keep us both goin' for the next three months, an' the rest o' the poke I'll put in the safe-deposit vault in the bank there, in both our names. Then I'm a-goin' to dust for New York; an' as soon as you're able to stagger round, Snowshoe, you light out for Siskiyou County. D'ye remember that big cement-gravel deposit we looked over twenty years ago—about nine hundred acres of it, up near Hornbrook?"

Snowshoe nodded. "You're goin' to sell him that conglomerate, eh?" he queried.

"I'm sure a-goin' to try, Snowshoe."

"Salt?"

"You bet!"

"How?"

"Nothin' so coarse as Mexicans with gold-filled cigarettes. No, siree! It'll require art to sell this swindler nine hundred acres o' gravel without a streak o' color in it! So we'll be artists, Snowshoe. We'll just tell him where the claims lie, lead him out to 'em, then walk away an' let him or his engineer sample every dog-goned acre of it, if they want to. They'll get an assay that'll drive 'em crazy, no matter where they take the sample."

"Sinful," Snowshoe Sam reminded his partner gently, "we ain't got dust enough to salt nine hundred acres o' that wuthless gravel deposit. An' though I don't never aim to be a short sport, an'll go as far as any man, still, as your pardner, I've got to remind you that this proposition's goin' to knock spots out o' our trip to Paree. An' you been settin' a heap o' stock by that journey."

"To hell with Paree!" roared Sinful John with splendid nonchalance. "I been readin' up on Paree lately, an', come to think of it, I'm afraid I've been overestimatin' that camp. In the first place, the john-damns, which is what they call the city marshals, won't let you wear a gun; an' if you hit a Frenchman a swipe in the snoot for insultin' of you, you git six months in the county jail. The only thing that's left for a feller to do, then, is to cuss the shorthorn. An', Snowshoe, them Frenchmen don't know what cussin' is like! Snowshoe, they wouldn't understand us. If I was to call one of 'em the name that was sudden death in Ballarat an' Eureka an' Virginia City when we was young fellers, he'd think I was complimentin' him."

"Well, I'll be shot!"

"Yes, sir, it's a fact. Snowshoe, whenever you want to cuss a Frenchman just call him a camel; if you want to git him goin' for fair, call him a camel with two humps; an' if you want to see him tie knots in himself, 'low as how he appears to you to be a kind of cabbage, badly cooked! That'll always stampede him."

Snowshoe expressed proper amazement. "Wa-al," he concluded finally, "let's hope we'll save enough out o' the wreck for a trip to Frisco. We ain't been there since sixty-eight; an' they do say folks in Frisco has quit burnin' kerosene in lamps an' uses 'lectricity. Speakin' personal, Sinful, I ain't never been very strong for Paree myself."

"Then you wouldn't enjoy the trip, Snowshoe. However, to git back to business: As soon as you're able to toddle round you cross over into Siskiyou County, California, an' stake every acre of that gravel deposit. You can use the names of all our friends here in Kelcey's Wells; then, after filing the location notices, come back here, give each of the fellers whose names you've used one silver dollar an' git a quit-claim deed from them for the claims. Then git a lawyer an' incorporate 'em all in a company, an' put a couple o' fellers to doin' the assessment work, until I come back from New York with this Hyde person or his engineer."

"What'll we call the mine, Sinful?"

"Call it the Sweepstakes Minin' Company; an' don't use your own name in connection with the deal at any time. Have the locators deed direct to the company, an' put all the capital stock in my name, with two dummies, holdin' a share each, to make up the board of directors. I'll be president an' treasurer."

"High fi-nance, eh?" piped Snowshoe.

"You bet!" said Sinful John. "Minin'—how to do

it an' how not to do it—is one game you an' me savvy all the way. High fi-nance! I should tell a man!"

The cool young man on guard in the general office of Mr. Brandon P. Hyde, banker and broker, of Wall Street, New York City, looked up as the door opened cautiously half-way. An individual, alien to New York, stood in the aperture. Mr. Hyde's young man gazed upon Sinful John—for the visitor was none other—but said nothing, though his gaze plainly indicated that he wished to be shown—something; no matter what. On his part, Sinful John hesitated, awaiting a cheerful summons to enter and make himself at home. Thus, ten painful seconds passed.

"Well?" queried the cool young man.

"Son," Sinful asked mildly, "be the boss in?"

"Have you an appointment with him?"

"No."

"Then he isn't in—to you, I'm afraid."

"Suppose you tell him I'm out here an' ask him if he can spare me ten minutes o' his attention."

"Who shall I say wishes to call? Have you a card?"

"Quit joshin' me, young feller! Have I a card? Of course I ain't. Just tell the boss John R. Harkness, of Kelcey's Wells, Nevada, has called to sell him a mine."

"It would be as much as my job is worth. Mr. Hyde has mining propositions put up to him every day of his life, and just at present he isn't considering any further investments."

"He'll consider my proposition. He can't afford not to."

"Mr. Hyde's time is very valuable—"

"How valuable?"

"Well, I've known days when it was worth a hundred dollars a minute."

Sinful John stepped into the room, reached into his breast pocket, and brought forth a roll of greenbacks held together by a rubber band. Quite coolly he counted out a thousand dollars and shoved it across the counter toward Brandon P. Hyde's astounded outpost.

"I'm no piker when it comes to gittin' what I want," he informed the latter. "You tote that wad in to the boss an' tell him I'm not asking him to give me a second of his time. I'm prepared to buy it an' pay his price for it."

Mr. Hyde was a very human sort of bandit; consequently when his private secretary carried him Sinful John's message, together with the latter's cash, name and address, the financier forgot his customary taciturnity long enough to laugh.

"Money talks, Dawson," he declared. "Show him in."

Sinful John entered—a picturesque sight. A Battle Mountain tailor had made him a Prince Albert suit of a cut that, in those days, was strictly vogue. The horse-shoe-cut vest showed a "b'iled" shirt, with three small red studs therein. They looked like rubies, but were not. A low turn-down collar, with a black string tie, a wide black felt hat, and a pair of twenty-five-dollar boots, the beauty of which even Sinful's trousers, drawn over the boot tops, could not conceal, completed his attire. His thick white hair hung in wavy masses to his coat collar, but his cheeks were clean-shaved and his tobacco-stained beard and mustache had received the careful attention of a barber that very morning. He looked dignified, patriarchal; the compelling glance of his keen, fearless blue eyes won the respect of his victim before a word had been spoken.

"Sit down, Mr. Harkness," said Hyde cordially. "My secretary tells me you want ten minutes of my

time. I am very busy, but I can grant you ten minutes. Meantime there will be no charge." And he shoved the thousand dollars toward Sinful John, who pocketed it with a smile.

"Pretty able chap—the young feller," he declared with a nod toward the general office. "I just nacherly had to outgame him." He sat down. "Yes, sir, I wanted to see you," he continued; "but not for ten minutes. I can tell you my business in five minutes. I own all the stock in the Sweepstakes Minin' Company, of California. The Sweepstakes consists of nine hundred acres, more or less, of a cement-gravel deposit, an' I guarantee to deliver it with a clear title an' the assessment work all done.

"I'm offerin' it to you for a million dollars, cash money—an' you're a-goin' to buy it, because that deposit is from ten to twenty feet deep; an' I defy you to put a round o' shots anywhere in the face an' break down stuff that won't assay as low as three dollars a ton an' as high, in spots, as ten. I'm tellin' you, Mr. Hyde.

"Remember, however, I ain't wastin' your time. I'm an old man, an' I ain't got the million dollars necessary to put in machinery an' build ten mile o' flume to lead the water to this ground for sluicin'; so I'm sellin' out, an' I've picked on you to buy me out. The young feller outside told me you have minin' propositions put up to you every day of your life. I don't doubt it: but—you'll never have another proposition like mine put up to you: I'm a-goin' to leave five thousand dollars with you here an' now to pay the expenses of sending your engineers out to the Sweepstakes Mine to make an examination. If them engineers reports that the ground ain't as I represent, then the deal is off—an' it ain't cost you a cent to find it out.

"It's a hydraulic proposition, Mr. Hyde. I guarantee the water, provided you build ditches to bring it to the property; an' I'm tellin' you that when them engineers o' your'n reports back to you you'll see a hundred million in sight, an' you'll just about bust a leg runnin' to me with a certified check for a million dollars. Of course, if you buy the property you reimburse me for the expense money I've put up. That's fair, ain't it?"

Brandon P. Hyde chuckled pleasurably.

"You're right, Mr. Harkness," he declared. "I'll never have another proposition like this put up to me, for men of your caliber are too scarce. You are really willing now to put up the cash to guarantee me against loss if I'll take a chance and merely investigate your property?"

"That's the bet! She goes as she lies. My name is John R. Harkness; an' when you git the contract ready, an' signed, send the young feller over to the Astor House for my signature an' the cash. Much obliged for your time, sir. Good afternoon." And Sinful John picked his hat from the floor beside his chair and started for the door.

"Here, wait a few minutes!" Hyde called. "We'll fix this thing up here and now. If you have such a gravel deposit as you describe and it will assay one dollar a ton all through—and if, as you say, a million dollars expended on machinery and waterways will put the mine in operation—I'll buy it."

"You've bought the Sweepstakes Minin' Company," said Sinful John; and he sat down again, while Hyde sent for his attorney to come over and draw up a memorandum of agreement between him and his strange visitor.

When it was signed Sinful John paid over five thousand dollars, took a receipt for the same, and departed,

after having made an agreement to meet Brandon P. Hyde's engineer ten days hence at Hornbrook, Siskiyou County, California, guide him into the gravel deposit, and leave him there to sample the mine according to his nature and inclinations.

"Which there won't be nobody but your men on the ground," Sinful declared. "I'm tellin' you that cement-gravel assays so high, anywhere you put in a shot round a couple o' miles o' face to git your sample, that if me or my representative was standin' round you'd be inclined to think we'd salted the ground on you."

"Salting nine hundred acres of ground would be prohibitive as to price," Hyde suggested, out of the depths of his early experience in salting placer ground on the late Pyrites Kincaid.

"Well, I ain't takin' chances on rousin' suspicion," Sinful declared. "I can't afford to queer a million-dollar deal—not at my p'int in life. I'll lead your men in an' leave them there to investigate as they durned please."

When he left Hyde's office Sinful went to his hotel and sent the following telegram:

NEW YORK, JUNE 27, 18—

E. S. POSTELWAITHE,

HORNBROOK, SISKIYOU COUNTY, CALIF.

SOLD. ENGINEER DUE HORNBROOK MORNING

JULY SEVENTH

SINFUL

Immediately upon receipt of this telegram Snowshoe Sam went over to the general store in Hornbrook and bought two cases of seven-eighth-inch forty-percent gelatine dynamite, packed them on a burro, and disappeared into the hills. When he was satisfied he was far from prying eyes he carefully pried off the lids of the

cases and removed the dynamite; then, from his kyacks, he produced a polished-steel rod about ten inches long and a quarter of an inch in diameter; also, a bag of gold dust and a tiny funnel.

His nefarious preparations now being completed, Snowshoe Sam took up a stick of dynamite, drew back the folds of the heavy, greasy, brown-paper cylinder at one end and drove his steel rod down through the center of the stick for one-third of the distance, wiggled it round gingerly, and then withdrew it, leaving a well-defined hole. Into this hole he placed his tiny funnel and from the buckskin poke poured about ten dollars' worth of gold dust into the funnel. Then he stamped the gold down into the heart of the dynamite, covered the tiny hole, folded the paper back over the end of the stick, reversed it and performed a similar operation in the other end. When the task was finished that stick of dynamite contained between eighteen and twenty dollars' worth of gold dust, and there was no sign to indicate that the stick had been tampered with.

Wise in the ways of the miner handling powder, Snowshoe knew that an engineer, when breaking down rock for ore samples, is never foolish enough to use a full stick of dynamite. He cuts it in half. Hence Snowshoe craftily salted his dynamite from both ends, planting each deposit at about the center of a half stick. Hence, when a full stick was cut in twain the point of separation would be approximately at the center of the stick and the knife would cut through dynamite only, thus rendering discovery of the gold practically impossible. Snowshoe loaded all the dynamite, repacked it in boxes and nailed down the lids again, after which he dug a hole and buried the deadly stuff to keep his inquisitive jacks from investigating it to the detriment of all concerned.

Then he went fishing over on the Klamath River, and when fishing palled on him he took his old double-barreled, muzzle-loading shotgun and went hunting rabbits for Toby. Thus did he disport himself until the fifth day of July. On that day he journeyed back to Hornbrook, arriving late at night; and on the morning of the sixth he again visited the general store and bought the last two cases of dynamite in Hornbrook. The excess supply usually kept on hand had been used up by patriotic citizens during the Fourth-of-July celebration two days previously, and a new consignment would not be delivered for several days.

Snowshoe packed his two cases on his jack and trudged back to his camp in the hills, where he worked until far into the night, salting both cases liberally.

Thus it came to pass that when Sinful John, accompanied by Hyde's engineer and two husky assistants the latter could trust, dropped off the train at Hornbrook on the morning of the seventh, and the engineer went over to the general store to purchase dynamite at the source of supply closest to Sinful John's deposit of cement-gravel, or conglomerate, he was courteously informed by the proprietor that he had no dynamite in stock, having sold the last two cases the previous night.

Sinful John, having gone to take over the pack outfit and saddle horses he had ordered by wire, appeared at the general store a few minutes later, and to him the engineer explained the embarrassment resulting from the scarcity of dynamite. They would have to mark time in Hornbrook until the storekeeper should receive the lot just ordered.

To this unwelcome news the storekeeper further added, volubly, that he was plumb sorry; that he wished he had known sooner, because he'd sold the last two cases only the day before.

"Who'd you sell it to?" Sinful demanded.

"To a prospector name o' Postelwaithe. He's peggin' away at a claim back yonder in the hills."

"Oh, I know Postelwaithe!" Sinful declared, vastly relieved. "You say he bought two boxes?" The store-keeper nodded. "Then," quoth Sinful John, "he'll give us one of them if we agree to send him out a case from this here lot you've got comin' next week. One case each will keep us both going until more dynamite gets into this country. Come, boys! Climb aboard your horses an' let's crack along. We pass the claim o' this person Postelwaithe on our road out to the Sweepstake. He's an obligin', neighborly sort o' cuss; in fact, you'll find that folks in this country is generally willin' to give a feller in need about half o' whatever they've got."

So Sinful John led his victims out to the camp of Elmer Sampson Postelwaithe, who sympathized deeply with them in their predicament and cursed the mining game up hill and down dale. It appeared Mr. Postelwaithe had just come to the conclusion that quartz mining was a delusion and a snare, and was about ready to go back to his old love—placering. Consequently he would be glad to sell them three cases of dynamite, if they wanted it, and take back any part they found themselves unable to use.

Brandon P. Hyde's engineer was delighted with Snowshoe's liberality and neighborly spirit, and hastened to take advantage of it. Snowshoe pointed disgustedly to three cases of dynamite.

"Help yourself. All I ask is that you don't let it drop," he declared; he was not at all concerned, for all three cases were salted.

"Much obliged," Sinful John told him. "Have a cigar, Mr. Postelwaithe?"

"Don't mind if I do, Mr. Harkness," said Snowshoe.

Brandon P. Hyde's engineer in the course of time rendered his formal report on the property of the Sweepstakes Mining Company. He had put in shots and taken samples all over the property, which when washed and rockered out, showed an average assay of \$4.61 a ton, with so many million tons of gravel in sight that Brandon P. Hyde actually blinked at the enormity of the paper profits. Everything was as the whimsical Mr. John R. Harkness had represented, and the engineer recommended the immediate purchase of the mine.

So Brandon P. Hyde promptly transferred a million dollars by telegraph to a San Francisco bank, and wired John R. Harkness to call upon his attorney there and close up the deal; which being done to the entire satisfaction of the attorney, a certified check for a million and five thousand dollars was handed Sinful John, who, to the great amazement of the paying teller, insisted on receiving the entire amount in bills of large denomination.

With the million in a satchel, he then went to Los Angeles, where he purchased ten cashier's checks from ten banks, each check drawn for one hundred thousand dollars in favor of Marjorie Kincaid. These checks he enclosed in an envelop, together with a scrap of paper, upon which was written:

"I can't die a thief! I stole this from your father before you was born. Please forgive me."

Then he returned to San Francisco. At the What Cheer House he met Snowshoe Sam, who reported Toby in the basement of the hotel and everything lovely in his department; whereupon they sent that million dollars by registered mail to Marjorie Kincaid, at Kelcey's Wells, Nevada. When the return registry receipt gave ocular proof that Pyrites Kincaid's daugh-

ter had at last come into her father's fortune, Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam went blithely forth to the enjoyment of those worldly things they had set their hearts upon. It was a wonderful vacation; certainly Gay Paree was not a deprivation.

And when the poke was down to five hundred dollars Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam and Toby went back to Kelcey's Wells, bought a new pack outfit and drifted away through the purple haze into the silence, to sunrise and sunset, to the scent of the sage at dawn, and wood smoke and the odor of frying bacon in their eager nostrils at eventide.

When at last they came to their abandoned dry diggings, in the hot, cruel heart of Big Smoky, with the shimmering heat waves stretching away to the distant blue Toquima Range and the desolation of death round them, Snowshoe Sam heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank God, Sinful," he murmured, "we're home again!"

As for Brandon P. Hyde, he spent another million dollars installing machinery and building a dam up in the hills, and miles of ditches to lead the water to his vast cement-gravel deposit. The Sweepstake Mine ran a month and then shut down for the first clean-up, which netted nothing—neither more nor less.

Simultaneously with the receipt by Hyde of this horrible report, however, the latter's mail brought him a communication that, though disconcerting otherwise, at least furnished Brandon P. Hyde the meager comfort of an explanation. It was undated and unsigned, and read as follows:

Do not blame your engineer that made the examination. I slipped him a couple of cases of salted dynamite. The Sweepstake Mine wasn't a mine at

all—just a big deposit of conglomerate, which is a formation that often contains a lot of gold. The only gold the Sweepstake contained was the gold that was put into the sticks of dynamite. After your men had drilled holes in the face of the deposit they tamped the salted dynamite into the holes; when the dynamite exploded it blew the salt into the deposit, and when your engineer rockered his samples he found stuff that ran \$4.61 to the ton.

Now you know how Pyrites Kincaid felt when you salted that Mexican ground on him fifteen years ago. Pyrites is dead; but his heir will enjoy your million. The other million you spent on the ground is for exemplary damages.

It's a long lane that hasn't got a saloon at the end of it!

And when Brandon P. Hyde's detective came to Kelcey's Wells seeking information anent one Elmer S. Postelwaithe and one John R. Harkness, nobody could give him any information. If he had only asked for Sinful John and Snowshoe Sam!

And yet some people ask: "What's in a name?"

Bread Upon the Waters

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that he was forty and fat—that is, fat for his kind, which is generally thin, as becomes men whose youth has been spent in the saddle—and despite the further fact that he was unmarried and had never been known to be in love (at least enmeshed in nothing more serious than a casual flirtation with a biscuit-shooter or a restaurant cashier) Bill Garford was known throughout the length and breadth of the sovereign state of Nevada as a romantic figure.

Americans are given to crowning with the halo of romance men who, from lowly beginnings, have fought their way to leadership in finance or politics. Bill Garford was not aware that he had ever extended himself in the battle to win the unique position he occupied. In fact, he never thought about it at all and accepted, as a matter unworthy of comment, the fact that practically half the population of Nevada, which the last census sets at 77,000, in round figures, claimed with him, if not a close friendship, at least a familiar acquaintance. Muckers in mines, swampers in dance-halls, sheep-herders, and millionaires quite naturally called him Bill and borrowed money from him, and were amazed and indignant if he questioned their credit, which, by the way, he seldom did. At least he never questioned the credit of those who had no credit; as for the others he found it much simpler and more conducive to the joy of existence to cut a twenty-dollar

"quick touch" to five and proceed promptly to forget all about it!

Bill Garford was the son of a cow-man so unimportant that he could afford no wages to Bill—hence at fourteen the boy had left a lonely district school to hire out as a wrangler with old man Starbuck's Diamond S Ranch at fifteen dollars a month. In time he developed into a top rider; whereupon he was advanced to forty dollars a month and the confidence of old man Starbuck, who considered that when Bill should get his growth he might make a first-class riding boss at sixty-five dollars a month.

One day old man Starbuck and his boys drove three thousand head of three-year-olds down to the railroad at Winnemucca, and when the cars had been loaded, Bill Garford managed to induce his employer to advance him a hundred dollars on account of a season's wages. The old man didn't want to give it, but Bill pleaded that he had to buy some new blankets and overalls and some heavy underwear and tobacco and have a tooth pulled by a traveling dentist then in Winnemucca. When old man Starbuck commenced to waver, Bill added that he needed a suit of store clothes and a necktie and besides, he owed a fellow over in Lovelock ten dollars and wanted to send him a postal money order for it. So reluctantly old man Starbuck gave him the money and forced from him a promise that when it should have been dissipated in the customary delights of his kind, Bill was to be a good boy and ride dutifully back to headquarters.

The boss was a human old chap. He had been young once himself and while he had got over it, he had arrived at the years of discretion with a firm conviction that nobody but a fool will strive to reform a cowboy, particularly a very young one. Youth, he realized, must

be served; and he gave Bill Garford to understand that he considered a hundred dollars on account of the five hundred due him a serving totally disproportionate to his deserts.

In Winnemucca Bill dallied with the flesh-pots according to his times and the company he kept. Also he purchased some tobacco and a pair of overalls and sent the postal money order. Having no further use for money except to spend it quickly and go home, he tossed his last twenty-dollar bill on the Double-O of a roulette layout in a gambling house where the sky was the limit; and accompanied his action with the cryptic remark that he supposed he might just as well be broke as the way he was!

He won! A disbeliever, from childhood, in the frequency of miracles, he gathered up seven hundred and forty dollars and "went south" with it. His horse was in a livery stable and he started for that stable, intending to mount and ride back to soda biscuits, fried beef, beans, black coffee, and old man Starbuck. But Fate decreed otherwise. Half-way down to the livery stable a coal black cat started across the street in front of him. This was bad. He made a prodigious spurt and, despite his high-heeled boots, flanked that cat and forced pussy to cross behind him. Half a block farther he ran a nail through the worn sole of his right boot and upon seeking the nail discovered that it protruded from a shoe formerly worn by a mule. Mules have, fortunately, long narrow hoofs, so young Mr. Garford experienced no difficulty in insinuating this shoe into his rear overalls pocket, as a sort of luck piece.

He continued on and met a man who owed him two dollars.

Bill was too proud and generous and not quite cheap enough to mention this fact to his debtor, although the

debt was five years old; yet to his vast surprise the other not only mentioned it but paid Bill the two dollars. For interest he offered to buy Bill Garford a drink and as the young man turned to approach the nearest saloon he was gratified to observe the new moon over his right shoulder.

"I'm smeared with luck," he decided—and ordered a short beer. Then he bought and the amenities thus having been observed he bade his quondam debtor good night and hastened back to that gambling hall. Not for him, however, the roulette wheel where his luck had first manifested itself prior to the portents of more luck following so closely upon the incident. In this game the percentage in favor of the house is much too high and monotonous even for persons imbued with the sublime faith in their infallibility, which was Bill Garford's portion this night. A game for pikers and tourists that; one requiring of the player not a scintilla of intelligence. Why, a trained dog could play roulette as intelligently as a human being!

Garford gravitated toward a faro table in a distant corner and was fortunate enough to find a vacant seat.

No tyro, he, at faro bank! The bulk of wages earned in six years' riding the range had gone to pay for Bill Garford's education in this fairest and most fascinating of gambling games. He bought a stack of browns and played the limit; when he rose from his seat about noon the following day he had the faro dealer's check for twenty thousand odd dollars.

It was characteristic of him to accept a check from an unknown gambler; moreover, his fortune was more readily transported in that form, for gold coin was still the medium of exchange in the West and paper currency was looked upon with suspicion and disfavor; nickels were coined for little boys and girls, and pennies,

if accepted out of politeness, were secretly cast away as unworthy of a manly man's possession.

In those days a man kept his word, even at the cost of considerable inconvenience and personal sacrifice. Bill Garford had promised old man Starbuck he would return to headquarters, so to headquarters he returned. He finished the beef round-up with that twenty-thousand-dollar check in his pocket and then, with the feeling that he was playing a mean trick on Starbuck, he asked for his time. The latter was so shocked at the request that Bill jumped to the conclusion it was going to embarrass the old man to have a sight draft drawn on him that way. So he hastened to reassure him.

"I'm just quittin', Mr. Starbuck," he explained. "I'm not askin' for my money. You send it to me whenever you can spare it and that'll be O. K. with me."

"You tarnation imbe-cile," old man Starbuck rasped, "what you aimin' to do now? Have you figgered the probabilities o' starvin' to death once you git off'n the Diamond S range?"

Bill said he had figured on it and added the information that he planned to go into the sheep business. Terribly scandalized, old man Starbuck begged him not to think of it, to remember his father, who although an unimportant person, bovinely speaking, had nevertheless, managed to stagger along to the end of a long life without bringing disgrace upon the cattle industry.

"I know just how you feel, Mr. Starbuck," Bill replied. "Nobody hates sheep more'n I do, but still folks eat mutton an' if it wasn't for sheep I reckon you an' I'd have to sport overalls on Sunday an' wear our chaps to bed on winter nights. So a sheep has her uses, Mr. Starbuck."

"I'll be shot if I'll give you any money to invest in sheep," old man Starbuck stormed. "'Taint a kindness

for me to let you have your way, even if you have got the money comin' to you."

"Money ain't worryin' me none, Mr. Starbuck," Bill replied, and mounting his pony, he rode sorrowfully from the Diamond S, while old man Starbuck warned him, in torrid language, against the inadvisability of permitting himself to be caught with sheep on the present speaker's range.

The previous year had been a dry one in California and the rainfall that year had been approximately half of normal. All of his life feed and its availability had been the principal subject of conversation wherever the men of his world gathered, and Bill Garford knew that two years of short rainfall were spelling worry to California cattle- and sheep-men. So he went down into Northern California and purchased, at three dollars a head, five thousand ewes said to be in lamb. Although distrusting sheep-men on principle he had to take their word for this; and being a simon-pure cow-man he neglected to "mouth" his ewes, with the result that the sheep-men ran in about a thousand "gummers" on him and another thousand old ruins with bad feet and wrinkled necks. When some well-meaning marplot called Bill's attention to this he merely smiled and stated that it had to be a pretty poor sheep critter that wasn't worth three dollars.

He shipped his sheep to Nevada. A heavy snowfall on the upland deserts that winter had conduced to provide good herbage in the shape of the nutritious bunch-grass that grows between the stunted sage, so Bill Garford helped himself and inquired not into titles, although he did avoid the Diamond S range out of respect to old man Starbuck. He excused himself for his mendacity toward others on the ground that all sheep-men are natural grass thieves and nobody expects any-

thing better of them. "Might as well have the game as the name," he decided.

He had an eighty percent crop of lambs instead of the hundred and twenty percent he had been led to believe he would receive, and when the lush green grass had been cropped low, his old "gummers" failed to thrive on the tender tips of the sage, and gave up the unequal struggle almost to a sheep. His barren ewes he sold at a profit, however, and his lambs netted him nine dollars, so, despite the errors of his initial trade he profited both in cash and experience. He told himself that an education wasn't worth while anyhow unless one paid for it. The next time he bought ewes, however, he cast a jaundiced eye on wrinkled necks and bad feet, he looked for scab and sought maggots in the lamb's tails; he looked into so many sheep's mouths, seeking teeth that weren't there, that for all his youthful hardihood he commenced to *feel* like a sheep-man!

In five years he had a hundred thousand dollars in cash and got out of the sheep business for good. It was in his mind now to buy a bunch of good feeder cattle, lease a ranch and get back into respectable society again. But the cattle business was in the doldrums, so Bill drifted over to the new boom mining camp of Tonopah on the off-chance that he might get aboard something good there and take a ride. Following a quiet prowling about a month he climbed aboard Tonopah Extension, Tonopah Divide, and Lucky Strike, and waited for his stock to soar. When it had soared a million dollars' worth he unloaded—and a month later occurred the panic of 1907.

When on a train, traveling salesmen never place their pocketbooks under their pillows when they retire to rest. Experience has taught them that they are heir to human frailty and may leave the train without resur-

recting the pocketbooks! So they cache the pocketbooks in their socks and hide the socks under the pillows, for while one may forget his pocketbook the chances of forgetting his sock are exceedingly remote.

Bill Garford's faith in human nature had been shocked but not shattered during the five years that had elapsed since old man Starbuck had ceased to ride herd on his destinies. He had met some very low sheep-men and once a bank had collapsed with two thousand dollars of his money in it. Thereafter he never trusted little country banks with his main account, but carried that in the largest and financially strongest bank he knew of in San Francisco. Consequently, when practically half of the Nevada banks crashed in the panic, Bill Garford, like the astute traveling salesman, had money in his sock, so to speak, and with the sock in his hands (also in a manner of speaking) he took a year off while the United States of America adjusted its currency problems, and did a most remarkable thing.

He engaged a tutor and started to catch up on his neglected education! By degrees he ceased to employ double negatives and knew the reason why they should be avoided in polite society. He trained himself to sound his "g's" and learned cube root and square root and plane geometry and could bound the peninsula of Yucatan. He knew the capital of Florida and became so enamored of word analysis that he took another year off to run words like "manufacture" to their Latin lairs—*manu* from *manus*, the hand, *fact* from *facere factum*; to make, *ure*—well, what the devil did that mean? No matter. Manufacture meant, broadly speaking, to make a hand—and Bill was determined, in the homely phraseology of his frontier, "to make a hand" at something better than sheep and cows.

He took a trip around the world on the interest of

his million and odd dollars, quarreled with the food, grew homesick and returned to Nevada in time to buy in the wreckage of the Nevada State Bank with its seven branches. Ever since 1907 the state banking commissioner had been trying to bury this corpse. Bill revitalized it and with a million dollars capital became eventually what he was on the day Uncle Jimmy Breeze blew into his office—to wit, a romantic figure.

However, a truce on Uncle Jimmy for the present. The activities of Bill Garford from 1910 to 1924 are worthy of more minute presentation. Albeit he had lifted himself by his bootstraps and might be presumed to have discarded boots for the conventional foot-gear of bankers, something old-fashioned in Bill's make-up forbade the total amputation of things he had held dear in the days of his youth. He still wore boots with high heels, under the legs of his trousers. And they were handsome, hand-made boots. And he still wore a soft, wide-brimmed gray felt hat and soft shirts with collars and cuffs attached; when he traveled he felt more comfortable if he carried a short-barreled, large-calibered pistol in a shoulder holster under his left arm. He was still interested to a remarkable extent in grass, horses, the cattle and sheep market, mines and miners; although he liked to make money as a sporting proposition he had little real appreciation of the value of it. While the necessities of business forced him to figure interest, in his heart of hearts Bill Garford looked upon interest—that is, to a friend—as a form of legalized extortion.

For a yellow dog Bill Garford would do something. For a friend he would go the limit. The tale is told that, when he had been established as a banker some thirty days, old man Starbuck came creaking into his office, sat down uninvited, fired a thin amber stream at Bill's expensive brass cuspidor, missed it, and continued to

miss it for half a day. Any other banker would have carried the cuspidor closer to old man Starbuck or suggested that the old man edge up closer to the cuspidor. But not Bill. He revered old man Starbuck and talked grass and feeders and cattle thieves and beef prospects until noon, when he took the old man home to luncheon. Just about the time the bank closed old man Starbuck gathered his courage in hand and confessed that he'd like to have a little accommodation. The fact that he had not hitherto had an account with Bill's bank offered no bar to Bill's consideration of the loan. He said:

"Well, I imagine we can accommodate you, Mr. Starbuck. How much do you require?"

"About two hundred thousand, Bill," said old man Starbuck without the flicker of an eye-lash. "Want to buy the old Dabney ranch. It's been foreclosed on mortgage an' I can git it for the principal of the mortgage an' to hell with the interest. Mebbe I can git it for a little less than the principal of the loan. It adjoins my present holdings."

"I know the Dabney ranch," Bill responded promptly. "I'll let you have the money."

"Thank's Bill. I reckoned you would," said old man Starbuck.

Bill summoned his cashier. "Let Mr. Starbuck have two hundred thousand dollars, for five years, at seven percent—hell, no, let him have it for six. He's an old friend of mine. I used to punch cattle for him."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garford," the cashier answered, "but we can't let Mr. Starbuck have the money."

Bill Garford's eyes narrowed. "I guess this is my bank, isn't it?"

"Certainly, but the state banking commissioner has something to say about it also. Under the law you can-

not loan any individual more than ten percent of your paid-up capital stock. Your paid-up capital stock is one million dollars, so that limits the loan to Mr. Starbuck to one hundred thousand dollars."

Bill and old man Starbuck looked at each other. "That's a hell of a law," the old man declared. "Bill, this is sure a blow to me. I'd figgered for certain I was goin' to git that money."

"You'll get it, Mr. Starbuck. The bank will loan you a hundred thousand and I'll loan you another hundred thousand personally."

Old man Starbuck smiled again. Indeed he felt so good about it that when the notes were signed he offered no objection to the cashier's suggestion that he secure the loan with a first mortgage on the Dabney ranch. In fact old man Starbuck went further. He agreed to carry an account in Bill's bank and forthwith gave Bill a check for the money he had owed him for wages for upwards of ten years. He offered to figure interest on it too, but Bill told him not to mind, for he was very fond of old man Starbuck, who was almost the last of a rapidly disappearing tribe—a tribe that never split hairs, that paid its debts, somehow, sometime, but worrying not in the interim—a fierce, courageous old soldier of fortune or misfortune and a mighty good cowman! Bill told his cashier he respected old man Starbuck, and the cashier, trained in banking from his infancy, looked at his new employer with something of the mild interest one is apt to bestow upon a two-headed calf or a baby giraffe.

In those ten years—1912 to 1924—Bill developed into a romantic character. The worst banker in the world, yet he managed to build up his banks and waxed rich; wherefore he was accused of being a banking wizard. He dabbled in shrewd cattle deals, in sheep

deals, in ranches, in mining properties. About half his time he spent in the main bank in Reno; the other half was spent wandering over the state, of whose resources and possibilities he had more definite and exact knowledge than any man in it. He knew the cattle- and sheepmen's problems and sympathized with them; if they were honest, if they knew their business, if they weren't quitters, he would go far to favor them. People declared that luck was with Bill Garford because he deserved to be lucky; that he was a human being and the best good fellow on earth. When he cleaned up a couple of million dollars in a gold mine in Death Valley the whole state rejoiced; when he dropped a million in a copper prospect in Mason Valley nobody cared a hoot.

In 1924 he motored over to the Dabney ranch to ascertain why old man Starbuck was three years behind with his interest—and there he met old man Starbuck's daughter, Olive, more familiarly known as Ollie. Bill had just turned forty and Ollie was twenty-four and fair to look at. So Bill went back and paid his own bank, out of his own account, the interest old man Starbuck owed on his ancient loan! Also, he decided that since he would have to take the old Dabney ranch over for the loan, sooner or later, it might not be a bad idea to take Ollie over with it! There was but sixteen years' difference between their ages.

Bill looked at himself long and earnestly in a pier glass, decided he didn't look a day over thirty-five and commenced to diet. When he had taken off thirty pounds acquired as a banker, he was as lean and youthful as in the days when old man Starbuck considered he might make a first-class riding boss—whereupon he made another call on the old gentleman. Ollie remarked his improved appearance, played the cottage organ for him and baked him an apple pie.

He broke all the speed laws in the state on that three-hundred-mile drag back to Reno, because he was in a hurry to clean up a lot of neglected banking business and pay another visit to the Starbucks. He had stated casually that he would have business in that vicinity in about three weeks and might drop in on them. When three months passed and he had not put in an appearance, Ollie, who had inherited some of her father's resolution, drove the old man's shabby old roadster car into Reno and casually called at the bank to reproach Bill for his neglect. Unfortunately Bill was down in San Francisco, but his secretary told Ollie she would tell him who had called.

When Bill Garford returned to Reno and learned what he had missed he put his head down on his desk and closed his eyes in pain. So Ollie had grown tired waiting for him to call and had called on him instead! Well, it was too late now . . . yes, too late. If she ever wanted to see him again she would have to drive on to Carson City, where the state penitentiary is!

He was roused from his sad reverie by the advent of the state superintendent of banks, who entered uninvited and sat down opposite Bill. Mechanically Bill shoved a humidor toward him; when the official had lighted his cigar he put his feet up on Bill's solid American walnut table and for a long time stared out the window toward the snow-capped peaks of the Sierras in the west. Bill said nothing. He was drawing a subtle comfort from the other's silence. Besides, he was a patient man, an adept at waiting.

"Well, Bill," the latter said presently, "I wired you to come home in a hurry. Do you know that your bank's capital is badly impaired?"

"No, I didn't. And what's more, it ain't—I mean it isn't."

"According to your records you are right. Your books are straight enough and I've counted the cash you're supposed to have on hand and it's all there. There hasn't been any crooked work. No reflection on your integrity, Bill"—he paused dramatically and the vision of Carson City penitentiary faded abruptly from Bill's mind—"but a hell of a lot on your ability as a banker."

"How come?"

"You're loaded up with frozen assets in the shape of pretty full loans on cattle ranches and cattle; the cattlemen all over the country are broke and cannot pay their interest, not to mention anything on account of the principal, and the bank will have to foreclose to protect its stockholders."

"I'm the stockholders and I ain't—I'm not—yelling so's anybody can hear me, am I? What right have my dummy directors to put up a holler? I pay 'em good salaries, don't I?"

"A good many other banks are foreclosing on ranches—and when this foreclosing business is finished ranches in this state, as in other cattle states, are going to be mighty cheap. Anybody can buy one from a bank for the amount of the loan, and the bankers will weep tears of joy at an excuse to charge off the accumulated interest to profit and loss. That's going to depreciate the value of cattle ranches for years. You see that, Bill?"

"It sounds reasonable," Bill Garford admitted. "I know the cattle business has taken an awful licking the past five years, but I've got faith in it still if it's handled right. It's bound to come back. That's why I've been easy with cattle loans." He wrung his hands in futile distress. "When a fellow's been a cow-man he can't help sympathizing with a cow-man who has played the game fairly and is down and out through no fault of

his own. The post-war deflation is what put them on the toboggan. It caught the cattle industry at the peak of its prosperity, with large herds of high-priced cows, purchased on borrowed money, because money was easy to borrow. When the dust settled the industry had herds of low-priced cows on hand—and the banks were holding the sack. Then the bankers started closing in on the boys. If they'd stayed with the game they'd have saved the industry, but they got stampeded and ruined it." Bill bit off the end of a cigar. "I'm a hard *hombre* to stampede where my friends are concerned," he added.

The superintendent of banks looked at him with affectionate interest. "God only made one Bill Garford and then He broke the mold," he thought. Then aloud: "Bill, I'm a hard *hombre* to stampede where my friends are concerned, but—I have a lot of friends with money in your banks and it's my duty to protect them. You're carrying open notes, unsecured, that can never be collected. You're carrying secured notes with the security worth thirty percent of the loan; you're carrying notes secured by mortgage on real estate—and the real estate is yours for the asking, and you won't ask for it, because you know you can't sell it and you're afraid of the taxes. Bill, you've got to put your house in order. In fact, while you were away I put it in order for you. When I finished I found your bank's capital was impaired to the tune of about two million dollars—and unless you get that two millions into your reserve mighty soon I'll have to shut you up—all seven of you."

"But that'll make a crook out of me in the eyes of the public—and my friends. Every depositor I've got, almost, is a friend of mine."

"The trouble with you, Bill, is that you set altogether too high a value on that negligible human emotion known as friendship. It's a good deal like gratitude,

which some fellow once described as a lively appreciation of favors still to come. The minute your alleged friends get the notion that your bank cannot pay their checks on presentation, they'll curse you from the Great Lakes to the Everglades of Florida, from Mount Katahdin to the snow-capped Sierras. Bill, you're a romantic figure in the social, political, and economic life of this thinly populated state. It is still a frontier state and you are still a frontiersman—thinking straight, talking straight, acting straight. You could be elected governor or United States Senator if you cared for the job, but you don't—so you decide who shall have the job you don't want.

"You've had your finger in every big deal that's been pulled off in Nevada for the past fifteen years. Your word is your bond. You've never been mean or small or unkind or unsympathetic. You have hundreds of babies named after you. You've grub-staked more addle-brained old idiots who think they're prospectors than all the other rich men in this state combined. You've settled more quarrels out of court than most lawyers. Why, even blank-faced Washoe and Piute bucks smile when you hail them—and squaws call you Bill. Stray dogs come into your bank to say howdy." The official rose and stretched forth helpless hands.

"Bill, you tender-hearted idiot, I love you like a brother, but unless you can dig up two million dollars to make your depositors safe, I've got to smash the biggest, finest, simplest, truest gentleman in a state where they still continue to breed men. And the bigger they are the harder they fall."

And quite unexpectedly the man sat down and commenced to weep like a lubberly boy.

When he could master his emotions he looked at Bill Garford and said: "Well, William, what's the verdict?"

"I haven't any more two million dollars in cash than a jack-rabbit," the honest Bill replied without a split second's hesitation. "I've been staying with the industry, and all of my private fortune is sort of out on interest among my cow friends and some fair-to-middling sheep-men."

"Do you collect the interest?"

"Well, not lately, I must confess."

"Been pressing them for it?"

"Yes, I have. More than usual. I have to do it by correspondence, though. I've given up calling in person, because then they lick me. Make me feel like I owed them money instead of the other way round."

"Some time ago when I pressed you on that Starbuck loan, you got the money from the old man. Does he owe you anything personally?"

"I didn't get the money from him. I just paid his loan and took a chattel mortgage on his cattle to cover the advance. He thought I ought to have some protection. He owes me about a quarter of a million now—interest and principal."

"Well, the old man's square, but he'd never pay a note he could renew by paying the interest. He's got about twelve thousand head of good cattle that ought to bring a fair price now, if they're fat—and I am informed they are. By and large the lot ought to average forty dollars a head, even on this sorry market."

"But if I close in on old man Starbuck and take his cows," Bill protested, "he'll be out of business for fair. I can't ruin him at his age." He thought despairingly of Ollie!

"Then he'll ruin you, Bill. Let's see what else you've got that can be sold or hocked in a hurry."

They went over the list of Bill's private assets, and when the task had been completed the bank examiner

knew that nothing stood between Bill Garford and a million dollars in quick money except a lot of old-fashioned sentiment and a soft heart. So he decided to force the issue.

"If you close in on your personal creditors and simultaneously have the bank close in on its creditors, that two million dollars can be in your reserve fund in ninety days," he decided. "If you'll get busy at once I'll play the game with you."

"And if I do not?" Bill quavered—for the first time in all his life.

The bank examiner drew his finger across his throat and gurgled ominously.

"You mean that?"

"Surest thing you know. Myself, I never did like the board and lodging at Carson City."

It was Bill Garford's turn now. . . . He commenced to weep silently and sparingly. His great heart was broken.

"You're the biggest damn fool and the worst banker I've ever examined," the other shouted, and fled from the dreadful scene.

In about an hour Bill Garford's secretary came in. "There's an old prospector outside and he wants to see you, Mr. Garford," she announced. "He says you'll remember him right well. His name is Uncle Jimmy Breeze. He says you bought some claims from him once during the Bullfrog boom."

"I remember. He seemed to need the money. Good old codger, Uncle Jimmy. He was down on his luck at the time, and I knew a sure-thing mining promoter who wanted some ground to exploit. I sold the claims next day for a thousand-dollar profit and gave the profit to Uncle Jimmy. What does he want now?"

"Says he wants to see you."

"Did you tell him I was awfully busy? I'm afraid Uncle Jimmy wants a grub-stake."

"Yes, sir, I did, and he sat right down on the customers' bench and said he'd wait. He said time meant nothing in his life. Then I told him you were in a very important conference and couldn't possibly see him today, but he only shook his head, and said Bill Garford wasn't the kind to avoid an old friend just because he was a mite busy. So Uncle Jimmy is still waiting."

"Yes," her employer sighed, "and if I don't see him today he'll be back tomorrow and every other day until he gets what he's after. Or he'll lay for me outside the bank after hours or call at the house. Send him in and I'll get it over with."

"Miss Ollie Starbuck is also waiting to see you. She arrived before Uncle Jimmy Breeze."

"Oh, side-hill gougers and great snarling catawampuses—I mean catawampi!"

He looked so desperately pathetic the secretary's heart went out to him. "I can get rid of her," she suggested.

"Yes, I know, but I can't. I'll pull myself together. Send Miss Starbuck in in five minutes."

He was Bill Garford again when Ollie entered, smiling pleasurably as she observed the instinctive grace with which he rose from his desk and favored her with an old-fashioned bow. "Welcome, Miss Ollie," he said. "Won't you set—I mean sit."

Miss Ollie sank into the chair he indicated. She was a direct creature, like her father, and came at once to the milk in the coconut. "Dad's down with rheumatism," she confided. "At least he says it's that, but I have confidential information from the riding boss to the effect that my lunatic parent tried to bust a colt that swapped ends with him."

"When a man gets past sixty he ought to leave that to boys, Miss Ollie. Was there something you wanted me to do for him—or for you?"

"Thank you, Mr. Garford. You anticipate things so promptly you reduce my embarrassment to less than one-half of one percent. Dad has about three thousand two-year-old steers that are fat enough for market right now, but the price is only five cents and he thought it would be much more to his advantage to hold them over until spring and put about two hundred pounds additional on them. He thinks that sort of stuff might bring eight cents then. But he'll have to buy about a thousand tons of extra hay to carry them through the winter and he asked me to run over and see if you'll let him have seven thousand dollars to buy the hay."

Bill Garford's face froze in absolute horror. As Ollie had been speaking he had sensed the "touch"—and his mouth had gradually sagged open, while his eyes dilated. Both—that is, all three—of these organs now remained immovable, while his usually ruddy, bronzed countenance commenced slowly to assume the ripe color tones of an ancient cheese.

Ollie Starbuck's face flushed and then paled as she looked at him. "Oh, Mr. Garford," she cried, "is there anything the matter with you? Are you ill? Can I get you something—a drink of water?"

He shook off his creeping paralysis and raised a protesting hand. "Ollie," he said, "I have to tell you something. I haven't seen a great deal of you—not half enough to warrant my presumption in addressing you by your first name—but to hell with that—I beg your pardon for my profanity!—The fact is I only had to see you once to love you and every time I've seen you since my temperature has jumped a degree. Just now it's at the boiling point. You hear me? I love you. I'd

do anything for you. I'd go to hell for you. Do you believe that?"

Ollie's sweet face softened, her brown glance sought the rug. "I—I—well, it did occur to me that you might be more interested in calling at the ranch to see me than to see father. Father thought so too. He said you were up to something and I'm—I'm glad you were—Bill. The whole state loves you, so I'm sure I can't be blamed for following suit."

He leaned across the table, took her brown, firm hand in both of his great hands and kissed it tenderly. Then he said, quite firmly and distinctly, "Ollie, sweetheart, old J. B. Starbuck hasn't any more credit with the Nevada State Bank than a road-runner. Honey, a banker is talking to you now—and a banker has so many folks to think about that he can't play favorites. You understand, don't you, Ollie?"

Ollie bowed her head gravely. "I don't care to listen to the banker talking, Bill," she answered. "I'd rather hear the man."

"The man has no money to lend your father—and a little while ago the banker whispered to the man to tell you to tell your father to sell those three thousand two-year-old steers at the market and bring me the money, P. D. Q. The conditions are such that time and extra hay are topics we can't discuss. Realizing that I love you and want you worse than I want salvation, and that you love me and would marry me in a pig's whisper, it becomes my horrible duty to tell you that I'm going to bust the tribe of Starbuck high, wide and handsome. Yes, Ollie, I've got to close in on you folks. I've got to ruin old J. B., smash him, rub his nose in the dirt—old as he is and square as he is and big a fool as he is riding a disrespectful cayuse at his age. When I take over his range and his cows, can I take the Star-

buck family over also, and care for you both the rest of your days?"

She shook her head slowly, thereby scattering tears over a wide area on the polished top of his solid American walnut table. She was like old man Starbuck—resolute and independent. "No, we're not yet ready to accept charity, Mr. Garford," she said finally. "Close us out, if it's business, but don't mix sentiment with your business."

"If you only knew how much sentiment I'm mixing with my business you wouldn't call me Mr. Garford when I'm plain Bill to you," he pleaded. "I'm closing in on a whole *remuda* of cattle- and sheep-men, starting today. I'm on the round-up again and your father is in the corral and can't escape branding and ear-marking. I've got to do it or my banks will close their doors, and widows and orphans will curse me from here to the Utah line."

"You don't have to brand and ear-mark the Starbucks, Bill. We'll continue to be mavericks, if you please. I know my father well enough to speak with his authority now. Those three thousand steers are yours and whether you sell them or elect to buy hay for them and carry them through till spring is your affair, not ours. All we'll guarantee to do is to feed the hay if you buy it or drive the herd down to Winnemucca and ship it if you elect to sell now. You don't have to close in on us, Bill. You've been a mighty good friend while you could afford it, and now that you can no longer afford it we're smart enough to understand. You can have the remainder of the cows and a deed to the ranch whenever you send for either." She smiled wanly. "We've never been sued, you know."

"I'll send for that deed and those cows when I have to and not a second sooner, Ollie. Meanwhile, I think

we'll carry those steers until spring. Better not say anything to J. B. about this. He's old and he needs his sleep." He pressed the button on his desk and the cashier came in.

"J. B. Starbuck is good for seven thousand dollars," he announced. "Did you bring his note with you, Miss Starbuck? J. B. has a stock of the bank's note forms on hand in case he ever gets caught short."

Her eyes wide with wonder, Ollie passed out the note. The cashier favored Bill Garford with a severe look and departed, leaving Bill and Ollie looking at each other, mildly amused now, but a bit pathetic just the same.

"Come here, Bill Garford," the girl commanded presently, and while he was coming to her around the table, she pulled down the shade. Then she took his leonine head in both arms and pulled his face down against hers and held it there a long time in silence. "You're not licked, darling," she whispered. "Tell me you're not."

"I'm licked, Ollie. But—they haven't counted ten over me—yet."

"Well, when they've finished counting, Bill, and you don't know where else to go, come to me." She smiled painfully through tear-starred eyes and twisted lips. "It's getting so in these United States that one can't throw a rock up in the air without having it fall on the head of a millionaire, but blessed broken-down old sports like you are scarce. There, there, Bill. Buck up. It's all right and you're as full of pep as a butcher's dog. Aren't you, darling?" She kissed his tanned cheek.

"For God's sake, Ollie, go! I'm going to make a fool of myself," he pleaded. And Ollie went! She was a product of Bill Garford's country and knew much more about men than women!

It was nearly five o'clock before Bill could trust him-

self to greet Uncle Jimmy Breeze. The old prospector entered the office with a shuffling sidelong gait, not unreminiscent of the side-winder rattlesnakes of the deserts wherein for forty years he had been wandering behind a couple of burros, seeking his Eldorado. He sidled over to Bill and smiled up at him from under a scraggly white mustache; his brown, seamed old face wore an ingratiating smile, his eyes, blue and child-like, were those of the born visionary.

"Well, you old desert terrapin, Jimmy, how about you?" Bill greeted him kindly. They shook hands and he indicated a chair for Uncle Jimmy.

"Jes' r'arin' to go, Bill," Uncle Jimmy piped. Another direct individual was Uncle Jimmy Breeze, and Bill Garford knew it. Uncle Jimmy was certainly "r'arin' to go" the instant somebody should provide him with his annual grub-stake.

Bill decided to have the ordeal over with promptly. So he said:

"R'arin' to go where, Uncle Jimmy?"

"Prospectin' down to the Hell's Bend country, Bill. There's a range o' low hills down that way I been aimin' to prognosticate around in for forty year—an' if I don't do it this year mebbe I don't get another chance. Somehow, Bill, I got a sneakin' notion that country ain't never been half scratched over. A feller I met once in Silver Peak showed me some samples he'd picked up down there an' they sure looked mighty soothin' to the eye. He was figgerin' on goin' back in but took pneumony o' the lungs over to Rhyolite an' was dead in four hours."

Bill handed Uncle Jimmy a cigar, and Uncle Jimmy proceeded immediately to chew it, so Bill brought the brass cuspidor over to his side and waited. "Well, Bill," Uncle Jimmy resumed, "it's been quite a spell since me

an' you met up an' a whole lot o' water has flowed under the bridges since. From what I hear you're richer'n hell. Got this here bank an' six branches, mines, ranches, cattle, sheep, horses, mules an' jacks, but nary a wife or papoose to leave 'em to. How come, Bill, you ain't done nothin' for your country?"

"No time, Uncle Jimmy. I'm always as busy as a one-armed man saddling a colt."

"We-e-ll," Uncle Jimmy drawled, "seein' as how you ain't exactly a pauper an' realizin' you ain't got more'n a couple o' distant relatives mebbe to leave your bank-roll to, the thought occurred to me mebbe you'd consider throwin' in with me. If you could see your way clear to grub-stakin' me for about two hundred dollars, Bill, you got my word for it I'll cut you in as a full pardner on anything I run across durin' the next year?"

He looked up at Bill wistfully, eagerly—pathetically eager! He reminded Bill of an aged terrier anticipating the receipt of a nice bone. He was desperate and Bill knew it. Hungry, perhaps. Certainly he needed a new pair of overalls, for the ones he wore were faded almost white and patched beyond further repair. His soggy old hat was a ruin, his miner's boots broken and warped. One of life's failures was Uncle Jimmy Breeze, only he did not know it and, dying, would not have admitted it. To his way of thinking he was engaged in an honorable enterprise. He was fully as much in earnest about developing the mineral resources of Nevada as was Bill Garford, and he was neither begging nor borrowing but merely offering one who had the money and the disposition an opportunity to profit to the extent of fifty percent of any treasure Uncle Jimmy might find in his futile and aimless wanderings through blazing days and frigid nights with the shadow of Death stalking grimly but unnoticed by his side.

Desert rats like Uncle Jimmy Breeze are picturesque characters; they had always appealed to a touch of poetry in Bill Garford. Whimsical, kindly, honest, dissolute, charitable, cunning, generous, and not very well versed in metallurgical lore, they constituted for him a human paradox. By divine right they were entitled to a hand on their elbows as they sidled along to their ultimate destiny—death alone in the desert from thirst, snake-bite, disease, or starvation.

Poor little old Uncle Jimmy! Why, he wouldn't harm a coyote! Bill's great heart went out to the pathetic wreck.

"How much, Uncle Jimmy?" he asked weakly, although he knew.

"Only two hundred dollars, Bill."

"I can afford that. I'll throw in with you, Uncle Jimmy, and if you find anything you think I ought to tackle wire me and I'll send an engineer to investigate." He rang for his secretary. "Please get me two hundred dollars for Uncle Jimmy," he ordered. "I'll give the cashier my check later."

"Whoop! Yow-w-w-w-w-! Wah-hooo!" yelled Uncle Jimmy and threw his ancient hat aloft.

"No shooting," Bill Garford warned. "That ceiling cost money and besides there's somebody in the office upstairs."

"Dang your ol' hide," Uncle Jimmy wheezed. "You're a good fellow, Bill, an' I'm beholdin' to you. By gravy, I got a sort o' lucky feelin' about this partnership of ours—a feelin' that this time I'm a-goin' to uncover the jewelry. Boy, I ain't a-goin' to be satisfied with nothin' less'n a thousand dollars a ton."

A little later Bill Garford stood at his office window and watched Uncle Jimmy round up a couple of packed burros standing outside. With a willow gad he smote

the little animals smartly across the rumps and disappeared down the street singing a not very proper ballad reminiscent of the adventures of a person who lived down on the San Juan River and had had considerable trouble with some skunk who, it appeared, had stolen his gal Lou.

"I wish I was—were—going with you, Uncle Jimmy," the man from the roaring town murmured. "Down yonder in the silence—where a fellow can forget, where worry never enters. But I can't escape, Uncle Jimmy. Unlike you, I'm not free. I've got to stay and clean up and oh, my God, what a star-spangled, one-hundred-and-fifty-percent hell-anointed fool I am to be running—operating—a string of busted banks!"

Uncle Jimmy pushed east. Like a coyote he had dug burrows all over the state and like a coyote it was instinct in him to travel in circles. There was some country to the east of Winnemucca he wanted to give one last look at before abandoning it to the ages, and then he purposed pushing south to Hell's Bend, then west to the Panamints, then north along the Funeral Range and finally back to Reno—and another grub-stake! He had a new pair of overalls, a new hat, and new boots now; he had beans and bacon and flour and salt and pepper and in his own picturesque phraseology they could all go to hell! He was on his feet again and outward bound for Eldorado. He felt lucky. Of course he had always felt that way with a new grub-stake, but this time he felt particularly lucky. He told the jacks about it as they jogged along through the dust devils and low-drifting alkali—for, not having a partner, Uncle Jimmy had long since acquired the habit of discussing his affairs with his jacks.

"Yes, sir, Molly," he said to his gen-burro, "we're

goin' to make the Big Strike this time, sure as death an' taxes. An' when we do, you an' General Jackson—hey, General, cut that out—are goin' to quit holdin' body an' soul together eatin' greasewood an' thistles, an' spend your declinin' days belly-up in alfalfa. Ya-hoo!"

Yes, life was certainly taking on a gorgeous hue for Uncle Jimmy Breeze!

He prospected the hills he had in mind and spent two months at it; then, packing his jacks he struck out across country again. In a valley through which the tracks of the Southern Pacific railroad ran he found some good feed for the burros growing along a water-course. There was a little growth of willows there, also, and after the hot and arid expanse of flat or rolling desert, willow trees always looked good to Uncle Jimmy. He liked to camp in them and listen to their rustling, to the blackbirds scolding in their tops—so he camped in that desert bottom.

He awoke about an hour before daylight, suddenly alert, listening! From a distance came the muffled report of rifle fire, with pistol shots in between. "Sheep-men an' cattlemen argufyin', I reckon," Uncle Jimmy decided, and when the firing ceased turned over in his blankets again. Presently he heard an explosion, followed in about fifteen minutes by the sudden exhaust of a locomotive starting—then another and another until the sounds blended in the purr of a train moving rapidly west.

"An' if that wasn't a passel o' bandits holdin' up the Overland Limited I'm a Shoshone squaw," Uncle Jimmy murmured. "Well, 'tain't no affair o' mine. All the railroad company ever did for me was to run into my pack outfit an' kill three burros on me. An' they never did pay me for them, nuther! 'Lowed it was my

fault, lettin' my stock ramble on the loose. No, I ain't a bit curious. It ain't up to me to git out in my stockin' feet, among snakes an' tarantulas, mebbe, to investigate an' see which way them bandits have headed. Besides, it ain't daylight, an' here I am snug as a bug in this here willer thicket beholdin' to nobody. No, sir-ee, Uncle Jimmy. You tell the whole damn world to go to hell."

He settled down again and commenced dreaming of gold, only to be aroused from his dreams presently by the sound of many hoofbeats approaching the willow thicket. He listened and presently heard men's voices.

"You stay put, Mr. Breeze," Uncle Jimmy ordered. "In two shakes of a lamb's tail you're liable to be in some might-ee sorry comp'ny, an' don't you forget the old sayin'—an' a true one—that dead men tell no tales. You an' I can't afford to die now with the hull year before us."

Some twenty head of loose horses came pounding across the draw and through the willows, but all that were headed directly for Uncle Jimmy smelled him i time (alas, no difficult task, it is to be feared, in that land of little rain and less water) and swerved, snorting, past him. Behind them men rode, swinging riatas and occasionally firing a pistol in the air.

"Running loose horses to muss up their trail," Uncle Jimmy decided and got out his old .45 to be prepared for eventualities.

Six men rode into the lee of the thicket and dismounted. "Now then, boys," Uncle Jimmy heard one of them say, "everything has gone off as slick as an eel in olive oil, and we have come to the second stage of our operations. Six men traveling in a bunch is deadly. That engineer is heading for Winnemucca at sixty miles an hour and half an hour after he gets there the entire state of Nevada will be up an' after us. We all know

the country, so there's no sense gettin' excited about this if we split up an' go our separate ways. This bunch o' broom-tails has covered our trail an' by the time the sheriff an' his posse get here the broom-tails'll still be here tellin' lies for us. This is as good a place as any to bury the swag. You all marked it down yesterday."

"Bury nothin'," another man protested, "Let's split it six ways an' separate."

"I'm willin' you should have your one-sixth, Louie, if you think you ain't likely to meet up with some resolute deputy sheriff who'll ask you p'inted questions an' maybe frisk you an' then question you some more—like this: 'My friend, where did you-all pick up these bonds an' all this currency? Does it grow in the sage? I reckon you'd better come with me an' do some tall explainin'!'"

Two other men chuckled openly at Louie, who made no further protest. "Light a fire, somebody," the first man who had spoken (evidently he was the leader) ordered. "Nobody'll see it—an' if the sheriff sees the ashes he'll think it's some cow-waddy's brandin' fire."

A tiny fire was going in a few minutes and by its light one of the men dug a hole with a short shovel carried on his saddle. Uncle Jimmy could not see anything except the flicker of the fire and the dim shadows of legs, but he could hear everything. The men worked wordlessly for about fifteen minutes and presently Uncle Jimmy was aware that the task had been completed.

"Now, then, something to hide the fresh dirt or to account for it," the leader announced. "Louie—and you, Jim—rope one of those mustangs and drag him in here."

Louis and Jim obeyed. Presently Uncle Jimmy heard the thunder of hoofs again as the herd of semiwild

mustangs were driven back across the flat in the direction whence they had come—and just as the first faint streak of dawn lighted the landscape the two men came dragging and driving a terrified mustang into the lee of the willows. Uncle Jimmy could hear the great, gasping, wheezing exhalations of the poor animal and knew that a riata was fast around its neck slowly choking it. Then somebody else must have gotten a rope around the mustang's legs and Uncle Jimmy heard it fall heavily within a few feet of the freshly disturbed earth.

"Keep a strain on that neck rope," the leader ordered. "He'll be dead in five minutes or even less. Don't want any blood. . . ."

Uncle Jimmy heard them drag the strangled mustang in toward the willows and over the freshly disturbed earth, but not until leaves and litter had first been scattered over it. "I don't think the sheriff will tail this dead horse around to see what's under him," the leader chuckled. "And there'll be enough of him left to prove a landmark. Now, then, friends, this is our program. Drag your freight in whatever direction occurs to you and head for some ranch first thing, lookin' for a ridin' job. In sixty days this thing will have blown over. Meet me here at sundown on the night of the Fourth of July and we'll declare a dividend. And don't any of you get here any sooner," he warned. "The man who does will have me to settle with—and you know me!"

They mounted and dispersed.

After a while Uncle Jimmy crawled out of the thicket in his underclothes and scanned the horizon in every direction. "Alone in the midst of all outdoors," he cogitated. "Hell's bells an' Great Jumping Jehosophat! For once in your fool life, Jimmy Breeze, you're on hand when it's rainin' duck soup—an' this time you're

not present with a fork. No, sir-ee! You're there with a dipper!"

He made a fire and cooked breakfast. Then he rounded up his jacks, packed them and started across the valley for the railroad, his agile old brain quite filled with thoughts of what he would do with the reward that would surely be his when the proceeds of that train hold-up should have been recovered—thanks to him—and a further reward of \$5,000 each, dead or alive, which the post office department always pays for a robber of the United States Mails. Of course Uncle Jimmy did not know that the bandit gang had robbed the mails, but he hoped devoutly they had. It would have been too bad if they had confined their operations solely to the express messenger's safe! That is, too bad for Uncle Jimmy.

Jogging along beside the right of way he came presently upon a newspaper which some passenger had evidently tossed from the observation platform. "More luck," he cried to Molly and General Jackson, and pounced upon it. He had not seen a newspaper in two months, so at once he sat down and proceeded to peruse it. In huge black headlines he read in the Reno Journal the words:

**BILL GARFORD'S BANKS IN TROUBLE
RUN ON RENO BRANCH OF
NEVADA STATE BANK.**

Uncle Jimmy Breeze wiped his spectacles and read on. A score of suits filed simultaneously by the Nevada State Bank and William Garford, its president and owner, to foreclose loans on cattle and mortgages on cattle ranches had given rise to a suspicion that all was not well with the bank's finances, otherwise Garford

would not have taken such action without warning. The state superintendent of banks had been observed rather frequently at the Reno branch of late; and when Garford, pressed by the newspapers for a statement in refutation of the gossip that was steadily being disseminated, had declined to issue a statement, and the superintendent of banks had taken refuge in official silence, a small-sized run had started on the Reno branch on Saturday morning. Up until the bank closed at noon, as was its custom, no checks presented for payment had been rejected. Monday was a legal holiday but unless some reassuring statement should be forthcoming on Tuesday from Garford or the state bank examiner it was practically certain that the run would continue and extend to the other six branches of the bank scattered throughout the state.

Then followed a brief history of Bill Garford's meteoric career—a kindly statement withal yet tinged with the poison of suspicion which leaps instantly, under such circumstances, to the minds of most newspaper men.

Uncle Jimmy glanced at the date of the paper, not that the date meant anything to him, for he never kept track of time, but because he couldn't think of anything else to do. The paper appeared to be quite fresh. The hot desert air had not faded it in the least. "Must be Sunday's paper," he decided. "So this is Monday—an' on Tuesday hell will pop for my Bill pardner. Jimmy Breeze, we got to do something. Yes, sir-ee. We got to do something mighty danged quick."

He did. He urged his burros at their best speed back to his camp of the night before in the willows, where he unpacked and made a fire at a little distance from the dead mustang, turned his jacks loose and lay down to smoke. And in the middle of the forenoon he saw,

through the willows, an engine with three cattle cars attached, halt on the railroad at the spot where Uncle Jimmy assumed the hold-up had taken place. A ramp was placed against the doors of the cattle cars and they disgorged saddle horses and men, who, mounting quickly, spread out, north, east, south, and west. Seeing the smoke from Uncle Jimmy's camp-fire half a dozen of them came jogging across the flat to investigate. Their leader hailed the old prospector.

"Hey, there, you desert rat. How long have you been camped here?"

"Since last night at sunset, mister."

"Know anything about the train hold-up that took place over yonder just before daylight this morning?"

"Know all about it," Uncle Jimmy piped back. "The shootin' woke me up. Then I heard the explosion when they touched off the express company's safe; a bit later a bunch o' mustangs came chargin' across this here flat an' through the willers, with six men drivin' 'em on. There's one of them mustangs over yonder. The one's in back crowded him an' he fell an' busted his neck, I reckon. It wasn't light enough for me to see anything but I can tell you this much. After the band o' mustangs had messed up the trail them six fellers said good-by to each other an' separated. You prognosticate around off yonder an' you'll pick up their trail. Reckon you'll need all o' your gang."

"And who might you be, prospector?"

"I'm Uncle Jimmy Breeze an' I didn't see a thing. All I did was to hear things. What day is this?"

The posse informed him that it was Sunday, thanked him and rode away to pick up the trail. And when they were out of sight Uncle Jimmy tailed that dead mustang off the cache, dug it up and uncovered two leathern mail-sacks, which he promptly packed on General

Jackson with his other impedimenta, covered the whole with a tarpaulin and announced to both jacks that they were headed for Reno!

About sunset he came to a tiny flag station and after scouting the locality and ascertaining that no human being except himself appeared to be within miles of it, he unpacked his burros, piled his equipment in the flag station and turned the jacks loose to shift for themselves. The two mail-bags he wrapped securely in the tarpaulin, dragged the heavy bundle out on the platform, and sat down on it to await the arrival of a west-bound train. One came along about sunset; Uncle Jimmy flagged it and climbed aboard, purchased a ticket for Reno, curled up in the smoker with his bundle on the seat opposite him and went to sleep. The conductor threw him off at Reno and with his bundle on his aged shoulder he sought a cheap lodging house. Once safe in his room, he ripped the leathern mail-sacks open and sorted their contents. They contained half a million dollars, in yellow-backed United States bills of large denomination, and a million and three quarters dollars' worth of United States Liberty bonds.

"Them skunks knew the registered mail when they seen it," he cackled joyously. He rewrapped the lot in his tarpaulin and went to bed. At seven o'clock he was up and out on the street. At a quarter past eight he was back with two second-hand suitcases which he had purchased in a pawnshop—and at ten minutes of ten o'clock when Bill Garford, in conference with the state superintendent of banks and his cashier, had decided not to open the doors of the bank for business and was dictating an announcement to be pasted on said doors for the benefit of a queue of anxious depositors six blocks long, he was startled by a brisk rapping at the window of the office overlooking the street. It was an

imperious summons. Bill Garford felt that unless it was answered the window would be crashed in. So he threw up the sash and looked out.

Before him on the sidewalk stood a vision—a little old man, freshly shaved, with a scraggly gray mustache, waxed ridiculously at each end, hair freshly cut. A lop-sided little man, whose twisted body appeared strangely out of place in an ill-fitting ready-to-wear suit of shepherd plaid, bright yellow shoes, a "b'iled" shirt and a black string necktie up under one ear. On this vision's head rested a jaunty straw hat with a multicolored ribbon.

"Lemme in the side door, pardner," the vision cackled. "I got to see you private."

"Who the devil are you?" Bill Garford demanded.

"Uncle Jimmy Breeze. Hell, Bill, don't you know your own pardner?"

"For the love of ready money! Jimmy, what in Sam 'till have you been doing to yourself?"

"Shet up, ye tarnation ee-diot," Uncle Jimmy hissed, "an' lemme in."

"I can't, Uncle Jimmy. I'm too busy. I have important affairs in hand this morning. There's a run on my bank—and the bank isn't going to open," Bill whispered. "Clear out and leave me alone."

"You go take a jump in the Truckee River, Bill. You ain't tellin' me nothin' I don't know. I've come to save you. I made a big strike over yonder near Winnemucca, an' when I heard you was in trouble I sold it to the Guggenheim crowd for two million two hundred an' twenty-five thousand dollars. I didn't have no time to wire you. It was a take-it-or-leave-it proposition—an' I took it. I got the money in yellowbacks to the tune o' half a million an' Liberty bonds for the rest. Quick. Lemme in—an' let's be private about this."

"I think you're crazy," said Bill Garford.

"I ain't. Dang it, Bill, don't I look like ready money? Lemme in."

Something told Bill Garford to clear his office and let Uncle Jimmy in. The latter entered bearing a suitcase in each hand. "I had to sell for about a quarter o' what that prupperty was wuth," he explained, "but the circumstances was desperate, so it wasn't no time to whine." He opened the suitcases and commenced throwing out bundles of Liberty bonds and bright, new, yellow-backed treasury notes. "Take 'em, Bill," he ordered. "Open them doors as per usual an' let that gang o' coyotes in to git their money. Dang your gizzard, Bill Garford, you never asked odds o' no man yet an' you ain't a-goin' to do it now if your Uncle Jimmy Breeze can help it. Fly to her, pardner. It's all we got, but you're welcome to my share of it."

"Oh, Uncle Jimmy, Uncle Jimmy," Bill Garford yelled, and folded his partner to his aching heart. "You've saved my honor." Then he plumped Uncle Jimmy down into a chair, thrust a cigar into the old prospector's mouth and ran out into the banking room. "Open the doors," he ordered the night watchman, and when the latter had obeyed Bill Garford stood on the steps and faced his depositors.

"This bank is solvent. It's capital is unimpaired," he cried, "and anybody who tells you different is a liar. Come on and get your money, and after you've got it don't come back to my bank. Take your filthy lucre to somebody else to take care of for you. The Nevada State Bank is going to pay its depositors dollar for dollar and liquidate and go out of business, because it ain't—isn't—the kind of business Bill Garford cares about. It's time I quit—and I'm quitting. Come on, you children. Come and get it!"

Two months passed. Into Bill Garford's office came a total stranger and sat down uninvited. "My name is David Homesley," he announced, "and I am an Inspector of the United States Post Office Department." He flashed his badge. "On the 13th day of May the Overland Limited was held up and robbed forty miles east of Winnemucca, and two registered mail-sacks were taken. They contained five hundred thousand dollars in new one-hundred-dollar United States notes and one million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars in United States Fourth Liberty Loan bonds. You pledged these bonds as collateral security for a loan of a million five hundred thousand dollars to the Third National Bank of Los Angeles three days after the robbery occurred and I've just learned of it. I'd like your explanation as to how they came into your possession."

Without a moment's hesitation Bill Garford told him.

"Where is Uncle Jimmy Breeze?" the postal inspector demanded.

"He's gone to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower. Uncle Jimmy made a big strike in the hills over beyond Winnemucca, and as I had grub-staked him, half of it was mine. We sold for three million the day before yesterday, but long before that I had grub-staked Uncle Jimmy for the Paris trip. I had a long talk with him before he left, and he confessed without shame how he found the money and how he had lied to me to get me to use it to stop the run on my bank. I've checked up with the sheriff, who informs me he found Uncle Jimmy camped at the spot where the bandits had crossed, and on the strength of Uncle Jimmy's statement that the bandits would return to dig up their loot at sunset on July fourth the sheriff and his posse went out there at daylight on the third and hid in the willows."

He tossed a telegram over to David Homesley. "Yesterday was the Fourth of July," he added smilingly, "and the sheriff wires me that all six birds fluttered into his hands." His quizzical glance appraised the postal inspector. "I sent a check to the Third National Bank of Los Angeles on July 3rd, to take up my loan," he continued. "It was a certified check, so if you'll drop in about the day after tomorrow I'll let you have those stolen bonds. They ought to be back by registered mail by that time. You can have a certified check right now for the money I used. And if you don't believe what I'm telling you, go and quiz the state superintendent of banks and my cashier, who saw Uncle Jimmy bring me in the money and bonds."

"I think I ought to arrest you, as a formality if for nothing else," Homesley replied. He appeared reluctant to give up the hunt.

"Why bother?" Bill Garford laughed. "I'd only be out on bail in ten minutes. Ten thousand men in this state would chip in to go on my bond. Ever since my banks got into difficulties and paid out dollar for dollar I'm a bigger banker than I ever was. You couldn't convict me in any court in the state of Nevada."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Garford, until you surrender those bonds and that cash, so I can return it to the bank in San Francisco to which it was consigned, I'll have to keep you under surveillance."

"Fair enough. And while you're at it you're invited to my wedding tomorrow night. Ever hear of old J. B. Starbuck, over Winnemucca way?"

"Never."

"Well, I'm going to marry his daughter. Old man's one of the biggest and most respected cattlemen in this state and as for his daughter—"

"Some folks," Homesley interrupted bitterly, "are fools for luck!"

The Sheriff of Panamint

CHUCKWALLA BILL REDFIELD told this story to me one cool night when we were camped at a "tank" on the edge of the Sheephole Mountains. We had supped and washed up the few kitchen utensils the old prospector found sufficient for his needs; having spread his tarpaulin and blankets over a depression in the sand, thoughtfully made to receive his hips and permit his tough old body to repose in comfort, Chuckwalla Bill lay smoking and, by the light of our sage fire and a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle, perusing a magazine. We had found it three days before as we crossed the Santa Fé railroad tracks through the Mojave Desert, and blessed the bored tourist who had tossed it from the rear of the observation car.

Presently Chuckwalla Bill sighed and closed the magazine. "My eyes ain't what they used to be," he complained. He listened a couple of minutes to the steady champing of the jacks as they browsed on the galleta grass close by, drew his Navajo blanket over him and considered life as it is not—in the magazines. "And neither is my patience with these writin' fellers," he continued suddenly. "Bub, have you read that there dee-tective story? It's about one o' these scientific fellers that does all his deetectin' with machines. He sticks some kind of a jig-a-do in the wall an' listens to them conspirators gabbing in the room upstairs; then he hornswoggles one o' the suspected men into holdin' a what-you-may-call-it that registers his heart-beats.

"The dee-TECTIVE counts the heart-beats while the suspect is normal; then he says, all of a sudden: 'Here, you, mister. Out with it now and no hesitatin'! Who the hell killed Cock Robin?' An' if that suspect has killed Cock Robin, why right off his guilty conscience gives a yank on his nervous system, causing his heart to skip two an' carry one, flutter a coupler times and speed up ten or fifteen or twenty beats to the minute. Of course this scientific dee-TECTIVE knows right away he's follerin' a hot trail, so he runs some more ranikiboo on the suspected party, who presently lets out a whoop o' terror an' says: 'Yes, I done it, an' I'm glad I killed him. He weren't fit to live nohow!' Which the said statement goes to prove this here suspect ain't got no conscience to tug on his nervous system, an' why his heart should go to poundin' ain't rightly demonstrated. Me, I've known killers that didn't have no more conscience than a side-winder an' couldn't be rounded up by no psychological dee-TECTIVES—you take it from me."

"For instance?" I suggested, for Chuckwalla Bill has lived every split second of his life, and I knew from experience that whenever the old gentleman presumed to take issue with one on any subject he could always cite a case in point to support his theory.

Why, Pinto Peters [continued Chuckwalla] and a murderin' hound by the name o' Blondy Holloway. Pinto Peters is the sheriff o' Panamint, away back in the eighties, when Panamint's the biggest boom camp in the West an' I'm her mayor, on account o' havin' made the original strike an' bein' the richest man in camp, an' public-sperrited to a degree that makes me hanker to trim the wool an' fleas off'n Panamint an' make a real city out o' her. Pinto Peters is a quiet, unassumin' feller o' thirty-eight or forty, who's been

lifted in his youth by the premature explosion of a can o' black powder while celebratin' his country's birthday. He's burned some, which leaves white scars all over his dark-complected face, and he's more or less speckled under the hide from gravel an' powder that the doctors can't never seem to pick out o' him. So we called him Pinto, an' in the grand left an' right o' politics after Panamint's incorporated, I nominate Pinto for town marshal, in which capacity he does such good work toward keepin' the peace without unnecessary killin' (as mayor I'm dead set against any killin' except as a last resort) that when Panamint becomes the county seat we run Pinto Peters for sheriff an' put him over like shootin' fish in a dry lake.

In his way, Pinto Peters is one of those scientific dee-tectives, only he don't work with instruments. Whenever Pinto Peters has any dee-tectin' to do, he just naturally applies common-sense principles an' a knowledge o' human nature an' lands his man; an' owin' to the fact that minin' camps in them days was run wide open an' everybody has money to burn, it stands to reason that Panamint, bein' the queen bee o' camps, attracts enough hard *hombres* to keep Pinto passin' busy. By an' large, his office ain't what you'd call a sineycure, an' durin' the first few years of our municipal existence, and while Pinto Peters is busy givin' Panamint the reputation for bein' bad medicine for bad men, there ain't any citizen that adventurous he gets to honin' for Pinto's job.

What kind of a fellow is this Pinto Peters? Wa-ll, now, son, he's just a plain feller to look at—a little bit short o' bein' a big man, an' a little bit long o' bein' a little man. He's mild an' quiet an' kind an' neighborly. He don't drink to speak of, on account o' whisky bein' bad for the nerves, an' he's more of a listener than he

is a talker. When he does talk, he's got a sort of apologetic note in his voice. In a crowd of ten men Pinto is the tenth man, unless them ten men happens to be the sheriff's posse, when somehow, without anybody's realizin' how he got there, Pinto's up in first place.

Really, there ain't nothin' remarkable about Pinto 'ceptin' his shootin'. He can draw so fast it's a case o' the quickness o' the hand deceivin' the eye, an' once he's ready for action, that old forty-five single-action gun o' his'n barks so fast it sounds like a volley. It's Pinto's pride an' pleasure never to draw first, an' in spite o' them drawbacks to longevity, I'm a Chinaman if Pinto ain't the sheriff o' Panamint until the camp goes bust an' commences what she has since finished—disappearin' from the face o' the earth. In the end Pinto's kicked to death by a jen' burro that's thirty-five year' old if she's a day.

It's Pinto's great knowledge o' human nature that enables him to make such a howlin' success in his chosen line of endeavor. If three honest men is settin' in a poker game with Pinto, an' a second dealer horns in, Pinto knows it first an' 'lows as how he's had enough poker to do him that day. If a crowd o' decent men is settin' in a room an' a crook steps up to the bar an' orders, Pinto gets nervous right off, like a dog dreamin' o' rats. He's what you-all might call specially gifted thataway, an' this here gift leads to some amusin' incidents. A killer, let us say, drifts in over the Nevada line. Pinto ain't never seen nor heard o' the feller before, but in the course of a day or two that killer finds himself alone with Pinto Peters at Bud Deming's bar, havin' a snort on Pinto.

"Be you aimin' to linger long in our midst?" says Pinto, casual-like.

"Can't tell, Pinto. Mebbe if I like the climate an' it

ain't too hard to earn a livin', I'll stay an' grow up with the camp."

"Well, I tell you," says Pinto, sort o' blushin' at his own gall an' lookin' down at his boots, "while I ain't intendin' no insult, it's the custom in this camp for every gent that carries his gun between his hide an' the waist band o' his britches to call an' file his pedigree with me, before proceedin' to engage in any social or business pursuits. I don't suppose, now, you've got any objection to givin' me some references from your friends an' neighbors over in Nevada?"

"Wa-ll, now, Pinto," says the Nevada gent, "I've got to 'low that ain't none o' your business."

"All right," says Pinto. "Roll your hoop, boy. Behave yourself, an' don't knife or gun nobody on brief acquaintance an' slight excuse. If so be you should have reason to suspect a feller of unsportsmanlike conduct in a card game tell me about it. Don't take the law i your own hands. In such cases I allers declare the game no contest—each gent takes back his money an' the unsportsmanlike gent leaves camp immediately if not sooner. Some of 'em goes one route an' some t'other, but—they all go! You just bear that in mind, neighbor, an' excuse me for havin', by reason o' the requirements o' my office, spoke kinder bluntlike to you. I ain't aimin' to offend."

That little talk of Pinto's was generally enough to indicate to the Nevada party that Panamint wasn't a healthy place for him unless he turned plumb respectable; so generally, after lingerin' a week or two for the sake of his self-respect, he'd cuss Panamint for a dead camp an' 'low as how he was goin' to move on to greener pastures.

Every so often, however, some gun-bully would drift in, 'lowin' to run things his way, an' so naturally him

an' Pinto disagrees before long—an' Pinto allers lets the gun-bully draw first—and shoot last, if at all. All o' them gun-bullies was drawed to scale in them days, an' a feller like Pinto could figure tolerably close just how they was goin' to act. But when Blondy Holloway drifted in he was a new note, bein' a different kind o' killer. I believe if Blondy hadn't been hung an' had lived till now, you-all'd call him a yegg.

Yes, sir, this Blondy's so plumb ornery an' non-conspicuous the most Pinto gives him credit for bein' is a sneak-thief or a drunk-roller. He don't tote no weapon, an' 'lows, when he lights in Panamint, as how he's lookin' for a job o' work in the Panamint Lily or some other o' the big silver mines that was operatin' in them halcyon days before the demonetization disease puts the crimp in Panamint's deck. Pinto looks him over on general principles an' forgets him.

Wa-ll, son, I reckon it's about a week later a prospector by the name o' Joe Reedley comes driftin' in from Hell's Bend, a-carryin' a coupler thousand dollars in dust an' aimin' to spend some of it in riotous livin'. He ain't in town two hours till he bucks up agin one o' these here gun-bullies Pinto's had occasion to caution. It happens this way: Reedley comes into Bud Deming's place, lets out a whoop and lays his poke on the bar, at the same time a-wavin' his arm to all an' sundry to step up an' liquidate. Among his guests is this Blondy Holloway and Tom Caldwell, the gun-bully. Reedley is dead sober at the time, an' the minute he recognizes Caldwell he says:

"Here, you, Tom Caldwell! When I invited all hands to step up, I didn't notice you in the house. I ain't aimin' to have no trouble with you, but at the same time I ain't plannin' to drink with you, neither. I ain't forgot that you killed my partner in cold blood an' got away with

it some two years ago in Tucson. Nothin' but the fact that I'm a peaceable citizen, a stranger in camp, and Christmas only a coupler days off prevents me from eliminatin' you here an' now. As it is, git out o' my sight an' stay out."

The words ain't out o' his mouth until Tom Caldwell's reachin' for his artillery, but Pinto Peters, who's standin' right behind him, pinions his arms an' the excitement fails to mater'alize.

"Brother," says Pinto, kinder softlike, in Caldwell's ear, "your life was in no danger from this man Reedley, an' you know it. Didn't I warn you about this habit o' takin' the law into your own hands? Now let me add my mite to Joe Reedley's suggestion. You git out o' Panamint within the next twenty-four hours—an' stay out. An' remember, Caldwell: If you ain't out by this time tomorrow afternoon, you ain't goin' to git out a-tall. We'll plant you here."

He takes Caldwell's gun, gives him a shove through the door, an' the incident is closed, 'ceptin' a little sound advice Pinto gives Joe Reedley—an' that is: "Stay sober!" Joe takes his advice, an' along about midnight he moseys down to the feed-coral where he's holed up his jacks an' outfit. Owin' to the fact that every room in Panamint's full-up an' men payin' a dollar for the privilege o' the dining-room table an' the floor, just to be under cover, Reedley beds down in the sand o' the coral with mebbe a dozen other prospectors an' goes to sleep. He never wakes up. Some time durin' the night he gets his skull stove in with a prospectin' hammer an' dies without lettin' a peep out o' him. It's done so quiet that even the men sleepin' close by don't know it until gettin'-up time.

Son, it's sure a mystery. The burros millin' around in the coral have killed all chance o' pickin' up a trail,

an' it looks to all hands like a plain case o' cold-blooded murder for revenge, because while Reedley's poke is missin', the buckskin sack is still in his pocket, an' as Joe was a free spender nobody sees anything suspicious in the fact that the poke is gone. Public suspicion naturally fastens on Tom Caldwell, who's still in town waitin' to go out on the noon stage, an' so Pinto Peters includes Caldwell in his round-up o' suspicious characters, an' locks 'em in the town jail to await the sweatin' process. On general principles, an' not that he has the slightest notion he's guilty, Pinto thinks it might be well to include Blondy Holloway, him bein' a shifty-lookin' stranger without visible means o' support.

Right here is where Pinto's knowledge o' human nature begins to manifest itself. He tackles Tom Caldwell first an' gets a flat denial, of course, but Caldwell can't prove no alibi; so after laborin' with him all day, Pinto concludes to hold him awhile on suspicion an' see if mebbe in the meantime he can't pick up a clue. He's firmly convinced in his own mind that Caldwell's done the killin', but he refrains from talkin' an' does a lot o' thinkin', in the meantime bringin' each fish in his net up for cross-examination.

"Chuckwalla," he says to me after three days o' futile questionin', "this Reedley killin' is shore some mysterious. I got a dozen men that might have done it, but none of 'em can prove an alibi that'll hold water an' somehow it strikes me a lot of 'em ain't any too worried about provin' their innocence."

Of course I'm mayor o' Panamint at the time, an' in my official capacity I've had to give some attention to the public welfare. Consequently I see a light where Pinto sees darkness.

"Pinto," I says, "you must remember Panamint's a boom camp, without houses enough to shelter more'n

two-thirds of her rapidly increasin' population. Remember also that while this here camp is hell with the lid off in summer, it's apt to freeze the whiskers o' Death in winter, an' it occurs to me that jail o' your'n ain't a half bad place for a busted wanderer to spend Christmas. It's my guess they're right comfortable an' aimin' to fill up on that turkey dinner you-all plan to give your boarders tomorrow. They're right comfortable in jail an' don't plan to do no talkin' that might turn 'em loose until they're tired o' jail an' anxious to drift."

That idea sort o' hit Pinto between the eyes. He sat down an' thought a long time, an' finally he says to me:

"Mayor, I'm a-goin' to find out tonight which one o' them birds in my cage killed Joe Reedley."

"How?" I asked.

"Never you mind, Chuckwalla," he says. "I tell you this much, though: the leopard can't change his spots nohow, an' human nature just naturally can't help assertin' itself. What you just said gives me an idea an' diverts my suspicions in an entirely new direction. There's one man in my jail that's plumb nervous at bein' in there, an' if so he's the man that killed Reedley—an' come to think of it, I believe he did—I'm goin' to give him a chance to convict himself. I been too precipitate in this deal, Chuckwalla. Just because Caldwell's a killer and tried to shoot Reedley for bawlin' him out in company that-a-way, I'm like all the rest of the people. When Reedley's found dead, I look for his only known enemy—Caldwell. I've took Caldwell's gun away from him the day before, which leaves him without his favorite weapon, an' opens up an excuse for him usin' the prospector's hammer.

"Come to think of it, though, Chuckwalla, did you ever hear of a gunman gettin' down-hearted because he's lost his gun? Right off he goes and begs, borrows

or steals another; he kills with a gun because he's got a reputation for bein' fast on the trigger an' he's just vain enough to want to earn that reputation. Besides, come to think of it still further, murderin' with a hammer is a low-down, cowardly form o' killin'—an' I'm bankin' Tom Caldwell's got courage to throw away. If he'd wanted to kill Reedley, he'd have waited until I wasn't around; then he'd have taunted Reedley into drawin' first."

"Pinto," I says, "that there line o' reasonin' looks air-tight an' water-tight to me."

"Seein' which," says Pinto, "we'll make a demonstration o' the ability of a human bein' to refrain from doin' the things he wants to do. Chuckwalla, right after supper, I'd be obliged to you if you was to wrap yourself up warm, heel yourself for bear, an' walk out o' town about a mile on the south trail until you find a good warm spot where you can command the trail. Stay there until mornin', an' if you see a mounted man dustin' for the Rio Colorado, stop him an' hold him until I come along."

"What you aimin' to do?" I says.

"Me?" he says, winkin'. "Why, I'm goin' to stay in camp an' get fuller'n a tick."

I couldn't get no more out o' Pinto, but bein' anxious to observe his experiment, I buckled on my two guns—thirty-eight's they was, on forty-four frames—took my blankets an' sneaked out o' camp after dark. I hole up in the shelter o' some malpais, where I can see the white trail in the starlight for half a mile.

Along about nine o'clock that night, when all the prisoners in the Panamint jail—there was upwards of thirty—was sound asleep, Pinto Peters appears in the corridor, all lit up like a Christmas tree an' carryin' a lantern. He has the big jail key in his hand, and he goes

down one row o' cells and up t'other, a-bangin' the bars an' howlin': "Hear ye, hear ye, all ye prisoners in Pinto Peters's calaboose. Attention!"

All hands crowded out o' their blankets to listen to Pinto, who's weavin' a little on his feet.

"God rest ye, merry gentlemen," says Pinto; "let nothin' you dismay. Have a snort." An' he goes down the line o' cells passin' a bottle in for each prisoner to take a jolt. Then he unlocks all the cell doors, orders all hands to dress *muy pronto* an' meet him in the corridor—which bein' done, Pinto Peters lines 'em up an' makes a speech.

"Gentlemen," says Pinto—whereupon all them worthless, ornery men knows he's more'n half drunk, or he wouldn't have called 'em gentlemen—"it has occurred to me that the Panamint jail is one hell of a cold, cheerless place for any human bein' to spend Christmas Eve, an' while as Sheriff Peters it's my sworn dooty to see you spend it there, nevertheless, an' ag'in, as Pinto Peters, human bein', I'm opposed to all forms of cruel an' unusual punishment. Therefore, dependin' on your honor as gentlemen, I'm a-goin' to turn you all loose, chuck away the key to the jail, lead you all down to Bud Deming's place an' give one an' all a touch o' high life. Do I hear a second to the motion?"

He did—a chorus of them.

"Very well," says Pinto. "All them that's prepared to play fair with Pinto Peters because he's playin' fair with them will step one pace to the front."

Every prisoner present steps one pace to the front, an' they all give three cheers for Pinto Peters, the human sheriff. Thereupon Pinto unlocks the jail door, chucks away the key an' leads his gang down to Bud Deming's place, which is a combination saloon, gamblin'-hall, dance-hall, an' restauraw. His entrance cre-

ates somethin' of a diversion, as may be expected, for since Pinto's party has been recruited mostly from Bud Deming's an' similar points of interest in Panamint, naturally there's instantaneous recognition all around, as the feller says. The nightly pleasures of Bud Deming's place is abandoned for the nonce, an' all hands surges up toward Pinto an' his delegation. Pinto, feelin' that explanations to his constituents is in order for his high-handed proceedin', holds up his hand enjoinin' silence, an' everybody listens.

"Bud," says Pinto, addressin' the proprietor, "gimme a drink. I'm a-goin' to make a speech, an' I want to wet my whistle first."

So Bud gives Pinto five fingers of red disturbance, an' Pinto pours it into himself at one gulp, drunkard fashion; whereat everybody turns to his neighbor an' 'lows as how Pinto Peters, the only teetotaler in camp, is mos' certainly celebratin' Christmas. There's heads shakin' here an' there, an' everybody's tellin' everybody else what a shame it is that a fine feller like Pinto should slip his hobbles after years of virtue.

"Ladies an' gentlemen," says Pinto, "I sinshereely hope there ain't no man in Panamint so foolish as to interfere in my program for these here feshtivities to-night, an' in order to guard agin the attentions o' sober-minded citishens, I hereby app'int Tom Caldwell a deputy sheriff."

He hands the killer one of his old forty-fives. "Tom," he says, "I got you in charge on suspicion o' havin' murdered Joe Reedley, but nobody ain't proved nothin' on you yet, an' as I'm a-holdin' you in detinue without due procesh of law, it's in my power to turn you loose—which I do for tonight—an' to nominate you assistant floor-manager at my party."

"I accept the nomination, Pinto," says Caldwell; an'

thereupon Bud Deming, which for all his faults, an' he had a lot, is the most human feller I ever met, sets up the drinks to the house an' bids Pinto an' his party welcome; the tension is relaxed, as the feller says, an' trade commences to pick up ag'in.

"Pinto," says Bud, as him an' Pinto an' Tom Caldwell an' Blondy Holloway (Pinto's took a drunken shine to Blondy, for some reason or other) are havin' a snort at the extreme end o' the bar, "ain't you-all afraid some o' these birds o' your'n will fly the coop?"

"Nary bit," says Pinto. "I've give 'em all due warnin' that any preshipitate retreat results in me cancelin' the order for the big turkey dinner tomorrow, an' a-feedin' 'em, one an' all, on sody biscuits an' water for a week—which naturally reshults in makin' every man his neighbor's jailer, because none of 'em is figurin' on lettin' the other feller do 'em out of his rights. I'm just a-bankin' on human nature, Bud."

"If you'd sized up human nature acrosst a bar as long as I have," says Bud, "you wouldn't have so much faith in it. I'm a-layin' you five to one, Pinto, somebody gives you the slip an' dusts before mornin'."

"Which if he does," says Pinto, "he's most certainly out o' luck. I got the fastest saddle-horse in this here county. Why, say: I'll give Tom or Blondy here a two-hour start on the next best horse in town, an' I'll have him within rifle-range six hours later. That there big blue roan hoss o' mine just don't know what the word *tired* means. His sire was Cyclone, out o' Tornado, an' his dam was Whirlwind, out o' Typhoon. He's a lineal deshendant o' Greased Lightning."

Pinto goes on thataway for quite a spell, braggin' about his hoss, with Bud disputin' him, till finally Pinto gets mad, 'lows as how the blue roan's not only a runner but a jumper, an' offers to bet Bud a hundred dollars

he can ride the roan in the front door an' from a fifteen-foot run jump him over the billiard-table without touchin'.

"A four-foot-an'-a-half billiard-table is some handi-cap," says Bud. "I'll take you, Pinto, on the understandin' that if you damage the table you pay for it."

"Eat him up, Tige," says Pinto, an' slams a hundred dollars on the bar. "Who-all'll be the stake-holder?" he says.

"Well," says Bud Deming, "seein' as how you ain't afraid to trust Tom Caldwell with a gun, I ain't afraid to trust him with the stakes."

"Suits me, Bud." Pinto turns to Blondy, who's been drinking soft drinks thus far. "Blondy," he says, puttin' his arm around the yegg an' huggin' him affectionate-like, "just to show this here pessimist Bud where to head in, I'm a-goin' to show him that what he don't know about human nature'd fill a book. You-all slip over to that little barn back o' the jail, saddle my blue roan hoss an' bring him over here. After I win Bud's hundred, the gang'll repair to the restauraw at midnight an' have a banquet."

"That certainly listens well, sheriff," says Blondy modest-like, "but the fact is, you're overlookin' a bet. With every man his brother's keeper tonight, how can I get out o' here to git your hoss?"

"That's so," says Pinto, his speech gettin' thicker an' thicker every minute. "I'll have Tom Caldwell escort you-all to the door. See that you git that hoss an' hurry back."

So Caldwell an' Blondy walk out together, an' at the corner o' the street Caldwell turns back. Comin' into Bud Deming's place again, Caldwell notices a change has took place in Pinto's demeanor, as the feller says. He's lost that drunken leer to his face an' is grinnin'

like a fool; likewise there ain't no sag to his person as Caldwell lines up at the bar alongside him.

"Tom," he says, "personally, I ain't got much regard for you as a man, an' better men have been hung on less circumstantial evidence than I've got to convict you. Somehow, I got a notion that if you was to be regularly tried, you wouldn't have no more chance than a celluloid dog chasin' an asbestos cat through hell."

"Pinto," says Caldwell, "I don't love you none, but I'll take a chance on you seein' to it that I git a fair trial."

"Thanks," says Pinto. "You're a-gettin' it right now. The jury's out, an' I reckon the verdict will be in about ten minutes from now. In the meantime, you might hand Bud an' me back our money, because my blue roan hoss ain't a-goin' to jump no billiard-table to-night. As sheriff o' Panamint, I declare that bet all off."

"Why so?" says Bud Deming, openin' his eyes in wonder.

"For the same reason that I'm cold sober now, whereas I was three-quarters drunk a minute ago," says Pinto. "For the same reason your gentlemanly barkeep has been feedin' me on cold Ceylon tea, which looks like red liquor but tastes better, with a touch o' lemon an' sugar added." An' Pinto laughs an' calls for drinks for his gang o' jailbirds.

Well, sir, they ain't scarcely set till Pinto's chief deppity comes bustin' in.

"Well," says Pinto.

"I follered him," says the deppity, "keepin' on the other side o' the street, in the shadder o' the buildin's—just like you said for me to do. He went down to the edge o' the Panamint Lily dump, scratched around a minute an' then headed straight for the barn. He rode out on the roan three minutes ago an' headed south."

Pinto Peters turned to Tom Caldwell. "The verdict o' the jury is 'Not Guilty,' " he says. "Sorry to have been forced to keep you in jail the past week, but mistakes will happen."

"None whatever," says Caldwell, an' he hands Pinto back his gun. Pinto turns to Bud Deming. "Slip into the restauraw an' tell 'em to set twenty-nine plates for the guests in my hotel," he says. "Blondy won't be there, or it'd be an even thirty."

It's ten minutes after twelve, an' I'm gettin' sleepy, an' cussin' Pinto for his experiment in human nature, when away up the trail I hear the sound of a shod horse. I listen, an' I make up my mind somebody's comin' like he'd been wired for an' delayed, an' pretty soon I see a blur away up the white trail.

"Chuckwalla," I says to myself, "here comes the man that killed Joe Reedley," and I fill both hands an' step out into the trail as he comes poundin' along.

"Hands up!" I yell, an' cover him. The horse, frightened, stops so sudden the rider goes lurchin' out on his neck, hangs there a split second an' comes sprawlin' down in the trail, all spread out like a starfish.

"You're under arrest," I says, an'—*bing bang!* he cuts down on me. I fires at the flash, rippin' his shootin' arm from knuckles to shoulder-blade, an' it's all over. While he lies there cryin' an' cussin', I take his gun away from him an' go an' catch the horse. Then I light a match an' look my man over. It's Blondy Holloway.

While I'm wrappin' up his arm to keep him from bleedin' to death, I hear another hoof-beat down the trail, an' pretty soon Pinto Peters rides up on his spare horse.

"Well, Chuckwalla," he says, "it kinder looks as if it was a safe bet bankin' on human nature, after all!

As the Scriptures say, 'The wicked flee when none pursueth,' and it occurred to me this Blondy Holloway person was a mite distressed at bein' in jail. So I put him on his honor not to run; then I give him an opportunity to run an' a good hoss to run with, includin' my old forty-five loaded with blank cartridges in the saddle holster! My chief deppity follered after he left my shack, an' saw him dig up Joe Reedley's other poke, where he'd buried it until the excitement o' the murder would have a chance to die out. Frisk him, Chuckwalla, an' see if he hasn't got the poke on him."

Sure enough he had it, with J. R. stenciled on the buckskin bag; so we took him back to jail, an' in the course o' time he's convicted an' hung. As for them other jailbirds, they all come stragglin' in about sunup an' went to bed in Pinto's jail. Some of 'em said afterwards they was strongly tempted to take advantage of Pinto an' *vamos*, but they just couldn't manage it, on account o' Pinto Peters' bein' so doggoned white that-away, an' treatin' 'em like human beings on Christmas Eve. Of course Pinto suspected Blondy Holloway, an' made it easy for him to convict himself, but even if Blondy hadn't been the right man, the scheme would have worked out just the same. The guilty man would have run, for Tom Caldwell had his chance, too. Still, a gun-bully in them days wouldn't run for nothin'—he had a reputation to sustain. But this here yegg Blondy—why, son, that feller was teetotally no good!

(With this summing-up of the case, Chuckwalla Bill bade me good night and crawled under his blankets.)

Cornflower Cassie's Concert

TOWARD evening Chuckwalla Bill and I emerged from the short second-growth forest of mountain and piñon pine through which the jacks had threaded their way for the past few hours and found themselves on a little mesa.

"Timber-line," said Chuckwalla Bill, with the instinct of the desert-bred answering my unspoken query. "From here on we drop mighty swift into the Mojave Desert. See that blue lake off yonder with the reddish islands in it? Well, that's the Mojave. The lake is a haze o' heat and the islands are the oxide of iron peaks o' buttes risin' out o' the haze."

He gnawed a generous mouthful from his plug of chewing tobacco, wiped the gnawed spot against the leg of his trousers—proving he was not lost to the niceties of desert hospitality—and proffered me the plug. I said I thought I would smoke instead, and sat down to do it.

While masticating his cud, Chuckwalla Bill gazed about him. Presently, with a preliminary thin exudation of tobacco juice, he said: "Might as well flop here for the night. In the days of my halicon youth there used to be a nice spring over yonder, an' jedgin' by the green spot it's still in business. Water an' green grass will appeal to the jacks an' we're on the edge o' timber-line and have all the fuel we want."

We outspanned for the night. Supper had been cooked and eaten before twilight faded; two thick

piñon logs had been piled on the fire and with his miner's boots removed and his feet outthrust toward the blaze, the old prospector was lying back on his blankets, his head supported on his crooked arm, the while he sucked quietly and contentedly at his pipe.

Presently, in the valley two thousand feet below us, a camp-fire gleamed and gathered brilliance. I called Chuckwalla's attention to it.

"Jes' another old desert rat like me puttin' up for the night in Coolgardie," he said without interest.

"Is there a town yonder?" I queried.

"No, son. There's the ghost of one. She kicked the bucket in the late eighties an' ever since her bones has been disappearin', stick by stick. I had no idea there was enough of her left to furnish fuel for that pilgrim's camp-fire. I busted up the bank president's desk an' started it to burn with dead checks in the spring of nineteen three—and she was four-fifths gone then. Still, mebbe the new growth of alders an' sycamores hides a couple o' business blocks. What with the snow meltin' every spring in the mountains an' an occasional cloud-burst Coolgardie manages to get enough irrigation to support some greenery before the Mojave drinks up the waste waters. I noticed in nineteen three that the erosion from up here had just about wiped out our cemetery. That comes o' plantin' our loved ones on a hillside. I remember argyin' agin it at the time the cemetery association was started back in eighty-one.

"When I camped there in nineteen three I found that cemetery all washed out an' the remainders of a host o' bygone acquaintances scattered about promiscuous. I hunted around until I'd located the skeleton o' Pansy Hedrick, so called because he weren't no pansy blossom but a wicked, no-good son of a horse thief that lived by his wits an' perished by them—he jumped the wrong

claim an' got wafted hence in a hurry, half of his fool head havin' been shot off first. Pansy had organized that cemetery association an' guaranteed each buyer of a grave perpetual care! Well, it wasn't hard to recognize Pansy by his half-portion skull, an' when I'd found him I says:

"Pansy, didn't I tell you this here cemetery would never hold together on a soft side-hill? An' didn't I tell you to argy the title to that claim in court? Now here you lie, all exposed to the vulgar gaze o' the multitude, which is me, and you Exhibit A to prove my argyment. Just for that I'm goin' to let you lay as you lie!"

"Did you recognize any other old friends?" I queried politely.

He nodded, sat up, rubbed his gnarly old toes and for a long time gazed down into Coolgardie, where the distant camp-fire gleamed in the gathering gloom. "I reckon I'm gittin' sorter old," he said wistfully. "Forty years ago I was young in Coolgardie, an' so was Liberty Hall an' Cornflower Cassie an' Modoc Bill Robley, an' here I set a-lookin' down on ghosts an' wonderin' what it was all about an' why God A'mighty creates folks to do the things they does an' then leaves 'em to lie out on a soft side-hill without perpetual care."

His pipe had gone out. He loaded and relighted it.

"We used to work our silver ore by the old roastin' process an' the timber up here was cut then for fuel an' sledded down into Coolgardie. What's here now is second growth. Lordy me, son, seems as if I can hear them sleds a-grindin' down the mountain; seems as if, even in this dark, I can see the Coolgardie stage with eight mules a-sneakin' into their collars, disappearin' in little puff-balls of alkali dust off yonder in the Mojave. The pessimists a-goin' an' the optimists a-comin'; Son,

them was the days! But I don't reckon they'll ever come ag'in. Somehow minin' don't appeal to the imagination no more like it useter. Go to any boom camp nowadays an' you'll find her stinkin' of oil!"

He shook his shaggy white head. "Still, I don't *feel* no older than I useter," he continued. "Just a mite lonesomer, that's all. Mebbe if I did feel older I'd manage to forget a lot o' things that *makes* a man old." And with this cryptic remark he lay back in his blankets again and I knew the story was coming:

I reckon I'd ought to begin with Modoc Bill Robley. When I first met up with this quaint disciple o' the gods of Take-a-chance he's perched on a stool at a faro table, midway between a Chinaman an' an Injun an' givin' the finest example o' buckin' a faro game successfully that I've ever seen before or since. This happens in Ballarat in an atmosphere that's composed of equal parts of oxygen, attar of new lumber, essence of fresh canvas, reek of red liquor, eau de blatin' powder, tincture o' lady powder an' extract o' Floridy water. A fiddle an' a piano is grindin' out "White Wings" as a sacrifice to the addicts o' Terpis-chore, and Cornflower Cassie, the premier song-bird o' the Golden West, is setting' up on the music platform gazin' down at the millin' multitude with them sad cornflower-blue eyes o' hern an' seein' nothin'.

The waltz has ended an' the dancers stand idle in the center of the floor, hopin' agin hope that the professor an' his companion in music is human enough to give 'em an encore. There is a momentary silence an' then a voice says: "Modoc Bill Robley has busted the faro bank. The citizens o' Ballarat will therefore have a drink or two or three or four on the said Modoc Bill."

Everybody turns toward the voice as Modoc Bill

risers from his labors. He has his sombrero full o' twenty-dollar gold-pieces an' he's holdin' this in the hollow of his left arm while with his right hand he waves backward an' forward, in an effort to dry the ink, a fresh-written check.

"Which the Chink is my friend an' a student o' the psychology o' gamblin'," continues Modoc, "whereas this here downtrodden Piute is my mascot an' even if it is a felony to sell liquor to him, he accompanies the Chink to the bar and hoists the customary grade of neck-oil with the rest of us. Anybody who don't approve o' my social instincts doesn't have to drink with me, whereas anybody who openly disapproves to the point o' chidin' me will have to voice his sentiments outside in the street. Swing your partners to the bar, ladies, gentlemen an' others, an' order whatever moisture you're accustomed to."

That was Modoc Bill Robley.

An' everybody drank with him an' his Chinaman an' his Piute Injun—that is, everybody savin' an' except Cornflower Cassie, who still sits up on her chair on the dais, smilin' an' noddin' refusal to forty urgings to join the stampede to the brass railin'. An' presently, over the heads of the mob that's millin' around him, Modoc Bill spots Cornflower Cassie an' makes his way over to her.

"Ma'am," says Modoc, bowin' low, "if you won't libate with the rest of us heathens, might I have the privilege of sendin' a case of wine around to your lodgin'?"

"I thank you, sir," says Cornflower Cassie, "but your hospitality would be quite wasted. I never drink."

"Well, have a cigar," says Modoc, smilin' the sort o' smile that nobody ever seen without lovin' the boy.

He drew a similar smile from the girl. "Thank you

so much, Mr. Robley," she says, "but I do not smoke, either."

"What's your particular weakness, ma'am?" says Modoc. "I'm that curious I crave to know."

"I'm mentally weak. I think I can sing."

"Will you sing for me, please?"

"Certainly." Cornflower Cassie slid in on the piano stool an' in a voice intended just for Modoc Bill she sang "Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?" And when she was through:

"Why do you do it?" says Modoc, and his voice was very reverent.

"Because, you curious man, I must have food. I answered an advertisement for this job. I didn't know what it was until I got here—an' then I didn't have enough money to go away. Now I have concluded that if I stay here a few years an' behave myself I can save enough money to tide me over the five years required to study. After that I wouldn't have to sing in places like this."

Modoc Bill excused himself, went to the end o' the bar, borrowed a pen an' ink from the barkeeper an' endorsed the check he still held in his hand. Then he came back to Cornflower Cassie an' tossed the check in her lap.

"Don't stay, ma'am," he pleaded. "If you do you'll get spattered. That there check is good for twenty thousand—four thousand a year for five years. That ought to do the trick, if you're careful. I just won it givin' a faro lesson. Money don't mean nothin' to me, ma'am. I'm just as happy as if I had good sense. Please go."

"Modoc Bill, why do you do this?" Cornflower Cassie's lovely eyes is filled with tears an' her lovelier lips is tremblin'.

"Because you've got to make your getaway before you're found out. How long have you been here?"

"I came yesterday."

"An' you'll go tomorrow. Look here, little lady, when you're back in New York or London or some place receivin' the homage o' the music-lovin' world, do you want somebody shoutin' to that world that he knew you when you was singin' in a dance hall in Ballarat? Don't you know that the higher you climb the more rocks you have to dodge? Ma'am, if you linger here when God A'mighty give you the voice of an angel, you'll accumulate so many I-knew-her-when friends you won't be able to outlive the last o' the skunks."

"That's not the reason," says Cornflower Cassie. By the way, that wasn't her name. Somebody just called her that the first night she appeared in that place on account of her eyes being a cornflower-blue. "No man gives a strange girl good sound advice an' twenty thousand dollars for nothin'! I'm lookin' for the joker in the deck."

"Which there isn't any joker in this deck, my dear," says Modoc Bill. "There mustn't be. Once I sat in a game an' the deck we played with had a joker—an' now, back where I come from, there are still a couple o' thousand people who knew me when. I wouldn't want that to happen to you."

"You never were a bad man, Modoc Bill. God just didn't make you a wicked man."

"No, He didn't ma'am. That is, not for keeps." He smiled at her again an' this time his smile's a bit twisted. The fiddler, who's come back to his fiddle an' who's deaf an' reads folks' lips, tells me afterward all that Modoc Bill an' the girl have been sayin'. Which is how I know.

"But—I can't understand *why*," says the girl.

"There are no strings to that check. Please take it an' go—while you have eyes like that—an' a smile like that—an' part your hair plain, in the middle, like my mother—an' before you learn to drink champagne—an' smoke cigars. Yes, please go—because I want you to, because it'll hurt Modoc Bill Robley to see you go to hell an' because he wants to lug through life the memory o' somethin' decent to offset somethin' unpleasant he had to do once. Won't you please go?"

She held out her hand to him. Modoc Bill looked at her once, like he was askin' permission—then he bent over that little hand an' kissed it. "Thank you," says he. "You're very kind to me, ma'am."

"When I'm rich may I repay it?" says Cornflower Cassie.

"I wouldn't keep you under a sense of obligation, ma'am. When you get settled you might write to me here an' give me your address an' tell me how you're comin' on. I'm that curious I'd crave to know. From time to time as I wander through my devious paths I'll send you a postal card, an' when you're a prima donna mebbe you'll come back to California an' give one concert for some unworthy object o' charity—me, for instance. But don't you bother to pay back the money until you're rich an' can afford it. Havin' won this money at faro I'd only lose it ag'in shootin' craps. You be a good girl now an' run straight an' don't accept no more jobs until you've investigated them. Good-by, ma'am, an' good luck."

He was backin' away when she calls him back. "You said you were that curious you craved to know. Aren't you curious to know my name?"

"I know it," he answered. "It's Cornflower Cassie. Just sign your letters Cassie. If you have another name I don't need to know it. I'm human. I might develop

in time an' remember that I knew you when!" An' Modoc Bill backs away an' rejoins his ornery friends at the bar.

Cornflower Cassie works out her shift that night—but she sings to Modoc Bill, standin' at the bar with the Chinaman on one side of him an' the Piute Injun on the other an' a bucket o' champagne between them. Her an' the orchestra was supposed to quit at two o'clock in the mornin', an' promptly at that hour the professor closes down his piano, the fiddler stables his agony box an' the two o' them go home. With the dancin' over, pretty soon that joint is emptied of everybody savin' an' except the night barkeep, Modoc Bill, me, the Chinaman, the Piute—an' Cornflower Cassie, away up at the end o' that den of infamy, lookin' white an' tired agin the dark background o' that big square piano.

An' she sits in at that instrument, playin' her own accompaniments an' singin' little old sweet songs to Modoc Bill, for which she don't get no applause because it was Modoc's party an' I was follerin' his leads, with the night barkeep an' the two heathens non-committal on the subject. Modoc just leans agin the angle o' the bar, at the far end, an' looks an' listens. . . .

At daylight she sang: "When other lips an' other hearts their tales o' love shall tell," and Modoc Bill heaves a big sigh, pays for his drinks, takes his two heathen with him an' departs. When he's gone Cornflower Cassie closes down the piano an' goes her way. She went out on the stage at ten o'clock the same mornin' an' Modoc was there to see that she went.

Just before the stage-driver gathered his reins the girl beckons to Modoc and he climbs up on the wheel an' leans over to hear what she has to say. Whatever she says nobody ever knows, but all o' Ballarat was

there to see what she done. She kisses Modoc, first on one cheek an' then on the other; then he steps down off the wheel, the stage rolls out, an' Modoc stands in the street starin' after it until there's nothin' left to see but a cloud of alkali dust. Then he turns slowly—an' looks into the barrel of a six-shooter in the hands of a strange man, settin' quiet on the front stoop o' the express office.

"I want you, Modoc Bill Robley!" says this stranger. "*Hands up!*"

Like lightnin' Modoc's right hand had gone in under his left lapel, an' I see at once he's a modest young man who prefers to wear his artillery in a shoulder holster, handy but concealed. For about five seconds his hand stays there while he sizes up the man on the stoop o' the express office. Then the hand comes out empty, an' the stranger walks over an' says:

"Turn around, if you please, sir."

So Modoc Bill turns around an' puts his arms out behind him an' the stranger slips the bracelets on him, takes his gun out o' the shoulder holster an' sticks it down between his hide an' the waistband of his trousers.

"I intended takin' you out on that departin' stage," says the calm party, "but what with one thing an' another, an' the possibility of a killin', I concluded to let the stage go on without us."

"Which you're a scholar an' a gentleman, sheriff," says Modoc Bill, "an' I'm obliged to you for your kindly consideration an' forbearance. I might have beefed you if I'd seen you first. Still, come to think of it, I wouldn't! Not with her lookin' on! I'm hopin' you'll hire a private conveyance an' move me out o' this camp *my pronto*. If you'll oblige me that far I'll pay for the conveyance, an' if you'll take these bracelets off'n me I give you my word of honor I won't run away nor

will I lift my hand agin you." He looked down the trail to the cloud of alkali dust. "Some day she's comin' back, sheriff. She's promised me she would. When she's a famous prima donna she's comin' back to sing to me—so I got to be on hand when she comes. No killin' or runnin' away—no more dodgin'. I'll do my bit an' walk in the sunlight. Five years the judge gave me. An' five years o' singin' lessons before she comes back! Sheriff, I'll play you fair."

"I got a sneakin' notion you will," says the sheriff, "seein' as how me and you used to be neighbors. Excuse me, Modoc, but then I've learned from experience that in the first excitement of an arrest a nervous an' desperate man is apt to shoot first and think afterward. Now that you've simmered down I reckon I can trust you."

An' he unlocks the handcuffs, tucks 'em in his pocket an' says to Modoc: "You can wait here if you want to. Me, I'm goin' to rustle up a team an' a buckboard."

So Modoc Bill sets down on the stoop o' the express office, gets out his pocket-knife an' starts a-manicurin' his nails. In about an hour the sheriff comes up with a team, him an' Modoc has a drink, the sheriff buys a box of cigars, an' him an' Modoc climbs into the back seat an' disappears from our ken. But not before Modoc Bill calls me over to the buckboard.

"See here, mister," he says, "you was there last night—the last o' the audience to go. I got a notion you're one o' these here fellers that can see through a ladder."

"Which my self-respect compels me to admit that I'm neither deaf, dumb nor blind, my friend," says I, "nor am I what the feller calls 'barren o' sentiment.' What can I do for you? If you need money for your defense—"

"That's too late. I've been convicted, but I broke jail

before they took me down to San Quentin Penitentiary. Now I'm caught ag'in and I'm goin' to do five years for manslaughter. It ain't fair. The man wanted killin'. He'd said twice to friends o' mine that he'd shoot me on sight, but both friends was killed in a cave-in in a mine before me an' the diseased had our meetin', in consequence o' which my plea o' self-defense don't go with the jury. Of course I killed him. I meant to kill him an' kill him first—on sight. I did kill him—but I had to beat him to the draw. Still, I don't care to have that girl find it out. Now, then, my friend, she said she'd write to me here. Will you do me the favor to call for my mail an' write her once in a while, signin' my name? Keep in touch with her, because when she's famous she's comin' back to sing to me—to show me the thing I created. Will you do that for me, friend?"

We shook hands on it, an' I done it; an' Modoc Bill completed his contract an' when his time was up—he had nearly two years knocked off owin' to good behavior—he comes lookin' me up an' finds me down yonder in Coolgardie, helpin' to start that camp along the paths of civic righteousness.

Now, minin' is one o' the things Modoc Bill don't know much about at the time, he havin' been a cow-man, but I give him a job on my claim an' teach him a lot o' more or less useful an' useless information about the game, me not knowin' a thing about it then or since. In his off moments the boy woos fortune via a faro table and is regarded as the luckiest gambler in Coolgardie, which it isn't luck at all but brains an' a thorough knowledge o' faro. When his luck is runnin' strong there ain't nary a man in Coolgardie that has the nerve to crowd his hand like Modoc, an' as a result times is frequent when he has more money in bank than the man that owns the bank.

Well, sir, I reckon it's crowdin' close to six years since Cornflower Cassie has left Ballarat, when the telegraph operator comes into the Sluice Box one mornin', where me an' Modoc Bill an' four others is whilin' away dull care indulgin' in a five-dollar limit game of draw poker. Modoc Bill is sittin' with his back to the door an' I'm facin' it. At my right, also facin' it, but not quite squarely, sits a gamblin' fool known to science as Silver City Harry, while at my left is a rich an' prosperous adventurer answerin' to the nom de plume of Gold Hill Cassidy.

"Cablegram for Modoc Bill Robley," says the telegraph operator, an' slid the envelop under Modoc's nose. He looked at it, smiled that compellin' smile o' his an' tossed the paper over to me. It was dated from Berlin, Germany, an' said as near as I can remember:

"Made dee-but last night before audience includin' Emperor an' members royal family. Dear good kind Modoc Bill you are such a lucky gambler. You have won your bet made so long ago in Ballarat. Critics proclaim me premier mezzo-soprano of world. It is not true but on strength of it have signed wonderful contract to appear coming season in Moscow. Please be good boy until I can come back an' sing for you. Your grateful Cassie."

Modoc Bill went on playin' without comment until about an hour later when he looks across at me with shinin' eyes an' says: "I wonder if she means Moscow, Idaho!"

"I reckon she does, Modoc," I says.

He was silent for another hour. Then he says: "What's a dee-but? She says she made one last night."

I told him to quit askin' me riddles an' play the game—an' just about that minute the stage pulls up just outside the door. I have the deal an' I pause to gaze

out the front door. All o' my fellow gamblers do likewise, with the exception of Modoc Bill, who's readin' the cablegram ag'in an' lookin' as joyous an' self-satisfied as a bear in a hawg-pen.

The last optimist to climb down from that stage, assisted by the stage-driver, is by long odds the king of optimists and no asset to Coolgardie. He's a person about as old as me an' Modoc Bill an' his clothes has been made by a tailor. His face is thin an' yellow an' he's so far gone with consumption there ain't no possibility o' tellin' whether in his prime he's the ugliest man in the world or the handsomest, although he's got a wild eye like a mean horse. When the stage-driver sets him down, the new arrival is that weak he has to cling to the driver a minute and organize himself. But the driver ain't no nurse, so he shoos this pilgrim gently up on the porch o' the Sluice Box and there this party o' the second part leans agin the door jamb an' commences to cough the kind o' cough that starts in the shoes an' keeps on comin' until, if a man has a heart in his chest, he feels it his duty to shoot the patient an' put him out of his misery.

"Barkeep," says Gold Hill Cassidy, "tote out about three fingers o' your oldest an' best whiskey to that coughin' tenderfoot or he'll die on your front stoop."

Now Cassidy isn't aimin' to be personal or make a joke of a fellow human's agony, an' the last thing he expects is that this consumptive hears him. As a matter o' fact he has already tossed four bits over to the barkeep to pay for the drink he's ordered for the stranger when the recent addition glares in the door.

"Which this coughin' tenderfoot," says he, "can mighty well afford to order his own drinks an' pay for them durin' the brief spell his carcass has to encumber this mortal coil. I know exactly how much money I

have, my friend, an' exactly how many days I've got to live, an' you can take it from the most vitally interested party that while I live I don't aim to be known in this town as an object o' charity spongin' drinks an' dyin' on the front stoop of a total stranger. I'll have you know I'm particular where I die, sir."

An' then he has a hemorrhage.

"Well, I do declare if our young friend ain't on the peck," says Gold Hill Cassidy. He's some embarrassed on account of havin' been called by a dyin' man, thereby deprivin' him of talkin' back. "Well, far be it from me to fracture the laws o' hospitality in our thrivin' little community. Our shortly-to-be-diseased brother can yip at me all he wants without danger of a come-back, an' next week nobody will help tote him with more reverence than me over to Pansy Hedrick's cemetery."

"You're a blatherskite, sir," says the coughin' pilgrim. "The least further lease o' life the doctors expect o' me is thirty days. Personally I expect to last sixty."

"I'll bet any gent present ten thousand dollars at even money you're dead in thirty days," says Gold Hill Cassidy. He don't relish bein' called a blatherskite, because that's what he is an' it ain't been five minutes since Modoc Bill has told him the same thing.

Now while this coughin' an' palaver has been goin' on Modoc Bill has apparently been re-perusin' his cablegram. He hasn't taken the trouble to turn round in his chair an' size up the new arrival, but when Gold Hill Cassidy makes his ten-thousand-dollar bluff all them gamblin' instincts of Modoc's come to the front with a rush.

"Which the gentleman from nowhere is correct in his interpretation o' your character, Gold Hill," says he.

"He called you a blatherskite an' a blatherskite you are. Nobody but a blatherskite would offer to bet any sum, not to mention ten thousand dollars he hasn't got, that this unfortunate gentleman kicks the bucket inside o' thirty days, not to mention sixty."

Now Gold Hill Cassidy *has* got the ten thousand dollars an' nobody knows this better'n Modoc Bill. In fact, Gold Hill's got nigh to half a million an' he's got it sudden an' recent an' it's gone to his head. He just naturally has to call Modoc Bill's bluff.

"Which I have the ten thousand an' my bet goes as it lies. This peevish pilgrim is dead in thirty days an' I have ten thousand dollars to back up my judgment."

"Your judgment at its best is feeble an' requires backin' up. I'll take that bet, Cassidy," says Modoc quietly.

"But," says Gold Hill Cassidy, strugglin' between amazement an' a sneakin' fear he's crawled out on the end of a limb an' Modoc's fixin' to saw it off on him, "you ain't even *looked* at this stranger yet! I ain't no killjoy. Help yourself to an eye-full, Modoc, an' then if you insist on throwin' your money away folks can't set up the claim as how I took advantage o' your childishness an' ignorance."

"By the holy poker," says Modoc, "I'm drowned in words! I don't have to *see* him. Can't I *hear* him? You said you'd bet ten thousand dollars. I've accepted your bet. Put up or shut up."

Gold Hill puts up, both checks is certified, the bet is set forth in writin' an' signed by both parties an' the writin' an' both checks are by common consent given to me as stakeholder. All of this time the sick party has been settin' in a chair on the stoop o' the Sluice Box where the sun can hit him; ever an' anon he wipes some blood from his lips. He looks up without enthusiasm as

Modoc, after cashin' in, drifts outside an' sets in alongside him, favorin' him with that winnin', kindly human smile.

"Well, old settler," says Modoc, "welcome to our city. My name's Modoc Bill Robley. Accordin' to your trunks your name's L. I. B. Hall." The pilgrim nodded. "What's the L. I. B. stand for?"

"It's an abbreviation for Liberty," says the consumptive, very snappish. "What I crave is liberty—liberty to be let alone. In fact, my motto is 'Give me liberty or give me death.'"

"Which I'll not give you either—for thirty days, Mr. Liberty Hall. I can't afford it. If I give you liberty mos' likely you'll go hellin' around this camp an' blink out on me inside thirty days, which the same inconsiderate action'll cost me ten thousand easy-earned dollars. You've just *got* to stand by me, Liberty Hall."

"I'll not be called Liberty Hall. That's a place, not a man."

"Which you won't be called nothin' else from now on unless some o' the boys take a notion to call you Lib." Modoc Bill falls to parin' his fingernails. Bimeby he says, "I s'pose you know you're lookin' an' feelin' a mite peaked, Liberty."

"Not bein' teetotally looney, I realize that."

"Would you mind tellin' me what brings you to Coolgardie?"

"Not at all. Desert air is good for consumptives an' I've heard it's particularly good at about this height above sea-level. One o' my old pupils, who used to be employed here, wrote me the climate of Coolgardie would revive a dead man. The liar! The climate o' this hole is goin' to kill me off sixty days before my time."

"Sho, sho!" says Modoc Bill. "You just got some alkali dust in them lungs o' yourn. Cough it up, old

optimist, an' tomorrow you'll think more of our climate because I'm goin' to take you away from it."

"This is sure kind attention from a total stranger, Mr. Robley."

"Boy, you're in the hands o' kind friends. As you come into Coolgardie did you happen to notice a smear o' timber on them high hills off to the east?" Liberty Hall nodded. "Well, tomorrow mornin' I'm goin' to lay you in a stretcher between two burros an' tote you up to that timber. There I'm goin' to house you in a tent openin' out on a view you'll never git tired lookin' at, an' night an' day you'll be breathin' *air* an' not alkali dust. You'll be gettin' a whiff o' yerba santa an' rest an' eat grub that's calculated to build you up. I aim to have a fresh Jersey cow transported into these parts to furnish you with sustenance; likewise I aim to import a real cook an' two trained nusses an' see can I snatch you back from the brink o' the grave long enough to win my bet."

"After that I suppose I can leg it alone an' take my chances, eh?"

"Your words distresses me sore, Liberty. Havin' brought you up that mountain I'm goin' to stick on the job an' bring you down, in one o' two ways, if it takes a year to do it. Liberty, you'll either walk down or be toted down in a box." And the honest Modoc Bill extends his hand to shake on his promise. But Liberty Hall don't see that hand nohow, so Modoc says, "Well, Liberty, a-settin' here ain't helpin' you any." An' with that he picks Liberty Hall up an' totes him over to the hotel.

Liberty Hall looks the hotel over sardonic-like. "Which you'll most certainly lose your ten thousand dollars if you house me in this rat-trap overnight."

"I'll admit she ain't much of a hotel, but such as she

is she's the best within a hundred miles, Liberty. Put up with it for twenty-four hours an' trust to me to snake you out tomorrow afternoon."

Modoc undressed him an' tucked him into bed an' sent for the doctor. Liberty Hall slept off an' on, an' when he wasn't sleepin' he was lookin' mean an' dispirited an' growlin' low, like a badger. Durin' the afternoon Modoc telegraphed outside to head a fresh Jersey cow toward Coolgardie; likewise a French chef an' two trained nurses. He's some busy, buyin' tents, beds, beddin', a cook-stove an' utensils, high-class grub an' all the comforts of home. Early next mornin' he has a string o' twenty jacks packin' his plunder up to this here little mesa, an' the following afternoon he lifts Liberty Hall into a stretcher hung between two jacks.

"Which I don't relish no such habeas corpus procedure," whines Liberty Hall. "Suppose these critters run away with me."

"Which they wouldn't get more'n ten feet before I'd have 'em both shot dead, Liberty. Don't worry, son. I won't take no chances with you."

"I ain't a-goin' to go up that mountain on no donkey I can't ride."

"You're a-goin' to do exactly what I tell you to do, Liberty Hall," Modoc comes back at him. "I can't afford to have you buttin' in an' spoilin' things now. Shet up, you whimperin' old woman. I'll lay another ten thousand that even in your prime you was as ornery as a porcupine, you little ungrateful, unmannnerly pup."

Liberty Hall looks murder at Modoc an' says very meeklike, "Well, don't forget my medicine trunk."

"Which I almost did," says Modoc. The said medicine trunk is settin' on the ground hard by an' Modoc riddles it with six shots from his forty-five.

Liberty Hall shudders as the medicine starts runnin' out. "You onfeelin' dog," he gasps, "to do that to a dyin' man."

"That poison is killin' you—that an' fool doctors. There ain't nothing but climate, nursin', grub, an' rest can cure you. Wake up, jacks. Onward, Christian soldiers! *Adios*, Chuckwalla."

In thirty days me and Gold Hill Cassidy climbs up here and finds the patient not only livin', but as bright an' sassy as a lynx kitten, so there's nothing for me to do but pay over the bet to Modoc Bill, who forthwith orders me to send up scales so he can weigh Liberty Hall. "Which I think this mean little side-winder is puttin' on flesh," says Modoc, "an' I'm that curious I crave to know for sure."

In about sixty days more Modoc returns to our midst, leavin' Liberty Hall to the care o' the nurses an' cook an' one roustabout, all of which continues on the Robley payroll. Come fall, Liberty Hall has stacked on thirty pounds an' is up an' walkin' around, killin' his own meat in the woods hereabouts. But Modoc makes him stick it out all winter, an' by New Year Liberty Hall ain't coughin' no more. So, come the first of May, Modoc has an expert lung doctor come in from outside an' make soundings, after which the medico declares that while Liberty will henceforth wander over the earth on fifty percent of his original lung capacity, still he'll get by if he don't hurry, because the fifty percent he's got left is certified all healed up. The doctor suggests, however, that it might be just as well if Liberty Hall stays in our country another year or so, so naturally when Liberty agrees, it's up to Modoc to get the feller a job that'll make him self-supportin'.

"Which if there is anything you can do, Liberty, save an' exceptin' bein' mean an' miserable," says Modoc

when Liberty Hall drops down into Coolgardie for the first time since he's left it, "I'd like to hear about it. I'm that curious I crave to know."

"Which I'm a pianist by profession," says Liberty Hall.

"Which I never heard of one before, Liberty. Explain yourself."

"I play the piano."

"That explains many things, Liberty. All is forgiven now. I never knew a piano-playin' professor in a dance hall that I'd trust farther than you could throw an old English sheep dog by the tail—which it seems to me that particular breed o' dog sports no caudal equipment a-tall! Well, I'll see what I can find in your line."

In about fifteen minutes he has a job for Liberty Hall poundin' the ivory on the day shift in one of our local deadfalls. Both salary, job an' social environment is degradin' but—beggars must not be choosers.

"You got a mortgage on my soul," says Liberty to Modoc, "so I must take orders an' stick by this job in this hole of a minin' camp until I pay you off in full."

"Which you don't owe me a dollar," says Modoc Bill. "On the contrary, I've made more money off'n you than you'll ever be worth. I sized you up from hearin' you, not from seein' you. When I made that bet with Gold Hill Cassidy I *knew* you was too doggoned ornery to die in a hurry—an' after I'd won my bet I concluded to blow some more money on you just to work out a theory. If you don't like your job you're free to leave us."

"You know very well I can't leave until I've saved a road stake."

"Then shet up, you pup, an' git to work an' earn it an' save it."

Well, son, I'm tellin' you, the first month on the job

Liberty Hall ain't anything to conjure with as a Western entertainer. However, his boss is artistic enough to see that, with practice, this Liberty Hall mebbe develops into a wizard—particularly as the miserable little cuss works like a dog, practicin' day an' night.

Bimeby he begins lookin' happier an' 'lows as how he has his old touch back; to do him justice he makes that piano resound like thunder up in the Panamints. When he's got both hands just a-flyin' an' criss-crossin' each other he sort o' shakes back his mane an'—bang! he gives her hell! About this time, too, his tunes begin to have a popular appeal, an' when it's recognized that Liberty Hall ain't no common professor but a sort o' fallen star that lights in our midst owin' to the caprice o' fate, the boss raises his salary an' tells him his playin' gives the place a tone!

Things was driftin' along this way, everybody happy, silver still far from demonetized, with Modoc Bill workin' a claim of his own now, makin' big money an' only dallyin' with faro on Saturday nights, an' Coolgardie squattin' down there in the valley, serene, indifferent to fate, as the poet says, when the mail brings definite tidin's o' no less a personage than Cornflower Cassie. Modoc gets a fat letter from her.

She's been the hit o' the show in Moscow an' the Emperor o' Rooshie has commanded her to sing before him. She's repeated her triumphs in London an' now she's signed a contract to appear in concert in the United States. She's got a bank-roll of her own an' every time she sings in public she fattens it a couple o' thousand dollars. She encloses Modoc her personal check for the money he'd give her, with six percent interest, an' informs him that, since her contract ends with her final concert in San Francisco, she'll be free to come to Coolgardie an' sing for him, gratis an' for

love an' old sakes' sake. Yes, sir, she'll sing for just him alone, an' twice a day for a month if he wants her to. An' any time he feels like it he can have all his Coolgardie friends in to hear her, too. The only trouble is that the pianist who accompanies her on the tour is goin' back to New York, so she will have to depend on our local talent an' she hopes the piano will be well tuned.

You should have heard Modoc chuckle. "Which there'll be a new piano freighted in an' if that scrub Liberty Hall can't play her accompaniments the lady's sure hard to please, Chuckwalla. I'll have a nice new cabin built for her to stop in, too. That hotel wouldn't do for Cornflower Cassie."

So Modoc pays two thousand dollars for a piano an' five hundred dollars to have it freighted in. Then he pays the fare an' wages of a man to come an' tune it as it rests on the stage of the operry house; an' when that's done he calls in Liberty Hall, tells him he's about to present the camp with a piano an' bring some culture into Coolgardie, an' suggests that Liberty give the new instrument a tryout.

Does Liberty Hall make that piano talk? I should tell a man! He's almost cordial to everybody tonight, an' with Modoc's permission he spends all his spare time practicin' on the new arrival. It pleased Modoc to hear Liberty Hall rampin' an' pussy-footin' up an' down that keyboard. "Which I'm plumb ignorant, Chuckwalla," he says to me, "with no more art or culture than a wolverine, but I'm here to tell you that little squirt sure knows his job. I reckon he comes close to bein' as big an artist in his way as Cornflower Cassie is in hers. Mebbe she won't be surprised to see the home talent of Coolgardie, eh?"

She come into town one spring day, settin' up on the

box with the stage-driver. I wouldn't have knowed her 'ceptin' for her eyes. She was seven years older now—not the bud Modoc Bill Robley had chased out o' Ballarat, but the full-blown rose that could make folks cry when she sang. She's dressed beautifully but none too loudly an' she's all alone. Modoc, wearin' a soft silk shirt an' a black silk tie an' a black store suit, stands on the stoop o' the express office when the stage pulls up to permit the driver to throw out the box—an' Cornflower Cassie beams down on him.

"You dear, blessed Modoc Bill," she cries an' holds out her arms toward him like a little girl. An' then—well, Modoc clumb up on the wheel an' lifted her down an' there they stood, an' she's in his arms an' cryin'. "Oh, my dear," she says, an' I reckon she don't care who hears her, "I've only seen you once—and, oh, how I've wanted to look into that honest, kind face o' yours these seven years past."

"Same here, ma'am," mumbles Modoc.

"It hasn't been an easy life, Modoc. The road has been rough and filled with chuckholes, but the memory o' you an' what you done for me helped me to bear it."

"Same here, ma'am," says Modoc. "An' now mebbe you'd wish to go to your house an' wash up before lunch. . . . I do believe—yes, I reckon, if you don't mind—I'll kiss you."

"Don't you want to hear me sing before I do anything else? You do want to listen to your handiwork, don't you, dear?"

"Come," says Modoc Bill—an' then he remembers me. "Shake hands with my friend Chuckwalla Bill Redfield, Cassie," he says. "He ain't never been in a jail an' he's certainly been a friend o' mine when I needed one. He knows all about you an' I reckon he'd like to hear you sing, too."

Cornflower Cassie give me her hand an' with a smile includes me in the party. However, while I'm more or less shy on culture myself, I know better than to horn in on them two at a time like this, so I excuse myself an' say I'll manage to control myself. Them cornflower-blue eyes says, "Thank you, Chuckwalla," an' her an' Modoc, she on his arm, walks like two children up to the opery house. An' there, with just Modoc for an audience, the premier mezzo-soprano of the universe sits in at the piano an' sings for him the song that will never go out of fashion—"Home, Sweet Home." I reckon Modoc never had much of a home ever, so he was sort of teched as I see when I peek through the crack o' the front door. Like Modoc, I'm that curious I crave to know what's going on. Well, all I see is a mighty lovely woman playin' an' singin' like an angel from Heaven an' a mighty plain man settin' in the front row with head bowed in his hands—so I knowed he was teched.

Then she sang for him "When other lips an' other hearts their tales o' love shall tell," an' when that was done she beamed down on Modoc Bill an' sung "Ben Bolt." An' I'm here to tell you, son, that if Coolgardie wasn't in that opery house it was present at that private concert. You could hear her all over town an' everybody gathered in front to listen.

Well, she sings somethin' in a furrin' language next, an' in the midst of it who should come boundin' up but Liberty Hall an' him as excited as a runaway hoss. I grab him by the collar.

"Vamose, Liberty," says I. "This here concert's private."

"But the woman is a tremendous artist," says he, strugglin'. But he don't call her an artist. He says she's an ar-teest.

"Which the same is none o' your business, Liberty. Get back there in the crowd to do your listenin'. Me, I'm Honorary Doorkeeper."

"But the accompanyst!" yells Liberty. "He is terrible. He plays like a schoolgirl—no strength, no technique. I'm the only soul in this camp that knows what she's singin' now—I'm the only man in America who can play her a decent accompaniment to that. Ah, let me in, Chuckwalla."

"The lady who does the singin' is also doing her own accompaniment. The concert is private, I tell you. She's singin' to Modoc Bill Robley an' whatever she does is good enough for him."

"What's she singing to that fellow for?"

"Well, Liberty, it appears that they're old friends. Seems, when she starts some seven year back, Modoc sort o' takes an interest in her an' backs her financially. Now she's come back from European triumphs to sing for him an' show him what a good job he's done."

Liberty Hall looks at me like he'd like to do me up. "Well, you're the closest an' best friend Modoc Bill ever had. I've heard him say so. Why don't he let you inside? Keepin' you outside ain't exactly my notion o' friendship."

"Nobody asked you to air your notions, you rat," says I. "My firm opinion o' you is that, barrin' the fact that you're a genius at the piano, you're plumb crazy otherwise. Modoc an' his lady friend *did* invite me inside, but I'm not low enough to accept. Them two has been countin' the minutes for seven long years until they'd know this minute together."

Liberty Hall's face clouded. "Are they sweethearts?" he asks.

"Well, jedgin' by the way she fluttered into his arms when she got off the stage—jedgin' by the way she

cried an' hugged him an' kissed him—I reckon mebbe Modoc *might* be induced to marry her."

"I must play for her before she leaves. She needs me. It is my chance. Promise me, Chuckwalla, you'll introduce me."

"Liberty," I says, "your insistence peeves me. What d'ye suppose Modoc went an' got that new piano for an' put it in the opery house if it wasn't to have you play for her at the public concert?"

He sighs with relief. An' just then Cornflower Cassie closes down the piano, steps down from the stage an' slips in alongside Modoc Bill. I dunno what was said, but there was no harm lookin' an' I watched her holdin' Modoc's hand an' talkin' low to him—an' then I seen him shake his head an' motion with his hand, negative-like; whereupon Cornflower Cassie just naturally puts her arms around his neck an' draws his head down on her shoulder.

All this time I'm holdin' Liberty Hall by the collar, but I sigh now with relief an' let go—an' before I know it he's slid in under my arm an' through the swingin' doors. I'm about to shoot him until it occurs to me that Modoc will reprove him for buttin' in; hence I decide to let Nature take her course. Nature took it.

Modoc an' Cornflower Cassie straightens up at the sound o' Liberty Hall's glad footsteps an' Modoc faces about. "Liberty," he says, solemn-like, "what do you want?"

"I want to play for this glorious, this wonderful arteest," says Liberty.

"While the lady appreciates your compliment, Liberty, the fact is she's through for the day. Git out!"

"Please, Modoc, please, just for a minute. May I not be privileged to meet the lady?" By this time he's in front o' them—remember, they're sittin' in the front

row—an' he's bowin' mighty low. "I could not possibly defer payin' my homage to so wonderful an arteest."

Of course, you see the fix Modoc is in. His natural instincts is to fresco that opery house with Liberty Hall, but on the other hand he's afraid if he gets rough with this piano-ticklin' maniac, Liberty sulks an' refuses to play at the public concert. So he spars for time an' says, without naming the lady: "Permit me to present Mr. Hall, the world's champion over-hand piano-player."

Liberty uncoils himself from that low bow an', comin' out of the professional bend, he appears to jerk himself together mighty sudden-like. Then he gives a sort o' squeal—I think he said, "Ah, my God!"—puts his hand to his forehead, gives his mane a shake an' stands starin' at Cornflower Cassie, his hands a-clutchin' in an' out, dramatic-like. "Marjorie! My wife!"

"Why, how do you do, Larry," says Cassie, in that fine, well-controlled, bell-like voice o' hern. "The last I heard o' you the doctors had given you thirty days to live. I was fully convinced you had obeyed orders. What made you change your mind?"

"Marjorie! My darlin' wife!" Liberty's shriller than a tin whistle.

"Still dramatizin' yourself, I observe, Larry. The good Lord meant you for a cheap actor, not a pianist."

She might have said more if Modoc don't interrupt her. The boy is laughin' like a fool!

"Modoc, you rascal," Cassie reproves him, "why do you laugh?"

"Because I got a sense o' humor," says Modoc. "Seven years ago I dealt you an' me a hand in Ballarat. I thought I had the odd trick cinched—an' up jumps the joker! Cassie, the reason this pusillanimous piece o' cat's meat don't die is because I spend nigh onto seven thousand dollars to make him live!"

"Well, you *are* a philanthropist, aren't you?" says Cassie—an' God bless her sweet heart, she laughs too. But me, I'm ready to cry!

"My dear," says Modoc, "was you ever wedded to this here?"

"I was—and am," Cassie confesses. "At eighteen some girls do foolish things."

"Don't apologize. I won't hold it agin you, Cassie. Up to the present my wisdom ain't none too remarkable, either. How long did you manage to put up with Liberty—or Larry, as you call him?"

"Well, he couldn't or wouldn't support me after the first six months of our married life, so I had to leave him to make my own way. That was when I came to Ballarat. From Ballarat I went to New York. Larry had failed to provide for me, but you can't secure a divorce on those grounds in New York. I had deserted Larry an' I hoped he would secure a divorce from me. Three years ago he located me in New York. He wanted me to return to him. He was ill an' destitute an' he appealed to my pity. I wouldn't live with him but I gave him three thousand dollars o' the money you loaned me—"

Liberty Hall lets out a yell like an old she-panther. "So you're the dog that steals my wife from me with your filthy dollars?" he shrills.

"What are you kickin' about, Liberty? You got some of it, didn't you?"

"That's neither here nor there, you—"

"Don't you cuss in front o' Cassie, you squirt. It ain't manly to choke your fifty percent wind off, but if you misbehave, boy, I'll squeeze you once for luck."

"Yes, Larry takes my three thousand dollars, Modoc," says Cornflower Cassie, "an' he never says 'Thank you.' On the contrary he abuses me an' 'lows as

how this money is the wages o' shame. However, he took it!"

"I had to," says Liberty Hall. "I was dyin'."

"Well, there ain't no law agin plain an' fancy dyin' so fur as I can see. Me, I'd have died first. However, that ain't why we're gathered here in convention assembled. Liberty, do you want to dwell with Cassie ag'in in blissful wedlock?"

"Which I sure do," says Liberty.

"You're a forgivin' little cuss. I suppose you're figurin' to play for her, an' between the two o' you the audience just naturally pelts you with gold-pieces."

"We might do worse," says Liberty Hall.

Modoc ignores him. "Cassie," he says to Mrs. Liberty Hall, "do you take this here Liberty Hall to be your lawful husband until death doth relieve you?"

"Which most emphatically I do not, Modoc, an' you know it. Control that sense o' humor, you old Samaritan."

"Well, that makes it a trifle bindin'," mourns Modoc. "Consequently, Liberty, under the circumstances you lose. As a gentleman you've just naturally got to make it easy for Cassie to get shet of you."

"So you can have her, eh? Modoc, *you* lose."

"Well, that wasn't why I suggested it. While I'm free to admit I'd admire for to be this lady's husband an' as such would do my best to make her happy an' comfortable, still I'm not interferin' in a family quarrel to attain that happy end. Me, I'm out o' Cassie's life here an' now. You drop out after playin' for her at the public concert she's goin' to give Coolgardie. I won't have you pesterin' her an', tryin' to drag her down to your level, Liberty. Once I had to kill a man. I've hoped ever since I could manage to wobble to the grave without havin' to kill any more rats, but you hear me, Lib-

erty Hall. You take program from me or die. That's final."

"You'll die, too."

"I'm willin' to—if it will make Cassie happy."

"I find this really humorous," says Liberty Hall.

"You pester Cassie a-tall or fight the case if she sues you for divorce, an' your fortune's quickly told. A tall, dark man will cross your path. After that you'll take a journey—not a long one—just over to Pansy Hedrick's cemetery."

"I'll think it over, Modoc."

"Thanks for them sane an' encouragin' words. Now, vamose. You bargain' in on my private concert has surcharged the atmosphere with electricity an' there's a low barometric pressure over the Coolgardie Opery House. Scat!"

Which Liberty Hall scats! I help him down the front steps with the toe o' my boot. Modoc Bill an' Cornflower Cassie resume their conversation.

Well, in about fifteen minutes Liberty Hall comes up to the door an' allows as how he wants in to talk to Modoc Bill Robley. So I sticks my head in the crack between the two swingin' doors an' yells:

"Hey, Modoc! Liberty Hall is callin'. Shall I let him in?"

"Well," says Modoc, "if he's thunk it over an' is prepared to give me a definite answer, let him in, Chuckwalla."

Liberty allows as how that's the case an' I let him in, but bein' by nature suspicious I keep an eye on him through the crack between the doors. Liberty backs up agin the stage, about ten feet in front of Modoc an' Cornflower Cassie an' facin' the door.

"Modoc," he says, "awhile ago there was some talk o' killin', which I don't take serious on account o' me

guessin' you ain't wearin' your weepoon with your Sunday suit while attendin' a concert."

"Go to the head o' the class, Liberty. I ain't wearin' no more hardware than a woodpecker."

"Well, I am," says Liberty Hall an' sorts out a forty-five, which he dallies with playfully.

"The argument's all on your side, Liberty. Was you figurin' on doin' some shootin' this mild midsummer day? Because if you was I'd advise agin it. Am I to understand that you teetotally reject my ultimatum?"

"Your penetration is right remarkable," says Liberty. "You're a mind-reader."

"I also forecast the future an' relate the past. My common sense tells me you ain't got the courage to reject my ultimatum merely because you suspect I'm not wearin' my artillery. All rats is cautious. They never run across a room but always travel around the side. Before you dared come back here an' get lippy to me you made certain I was unarmed. You went to my cabin an' there you found my forty-five in the holster, hangin' by the shoulder harness to the bedpost. Thereupon you possesses yourself of it an' come rampin' back here bigger'n four of a kind, an' all het up with the idea you're goin' to kill me. Now, Liberty, I'm a-tellin' you. You might miss me or wound me, but you won't kill me, because the age o' miracles finished a long time ago an' I'm holdin' all the aces. I beg o' you to keep your head on your shoulders before somebody shoots it off. I'm a-tellin' you, Liberty. If you try killin' me you're a dead man."

"You flatter yourself, Modoc," says Liberty Hall. "I'm goin' to kill you both an' then kill myself."

"Now, Liberty, listen to me! If you start squeezin' that old gun o' mine you're only goin' to do a half-way job. You'll kill yourself but that's all. However, seein'

as how you're dead set on takin' in a lot o' territory I won't argy with you any more. I'm only goin' to ask you one little favor an' then you start the fireworks."

"Name your favor. I suppose I owe you some consideration."

"I want to whisper in Cassie's ear an' tell her good-by—to be brave an' take the blow smilin'."

"I'll grant that favor," Liberty says. "Hurry up!"

Modoc Bill leans over the weak, white tremblin' girl an' puts his lips to her ear. Whatever he tells her it hearkens her up a heap, for she sets up proudly an' looks at her shrimp of a husband.

"I'll give the commands, Larry," she says. "Ready! Aim!" Liberty Hall lifts his pistol over his head an' brings it down slowly on Modoc's breast.

"Fire!" says Cornflower Cassie—an' I fired! Yes, sir, right over the girl's head—twice! The roar o' my old forty-five rocks that opery house an' when the smoke lifts Modoc Bill is sittin' with Cornflower Cassie's face pressed to his breast. Son, he grabs her so quick she never even sees Liberty Hall start fallin'. But over her head he nods to me to come a-runnin', which I do.

"Nobody needs to know who Cassie is, Chuckwalla. An' nobody needs to know that Liberty Hall was her husband. . . . No, no, sweetheart, you mustn't look. . . . Quick, let's rehearse the story. This Liberty goes crazy all of a sudden an' insists on playin' while Cassie sings. She don't want to sing an' he 'lows he'll make her, so he goes an' steals my gun, comes back an' starts a gun-play, whereupon you, knowin' me to be unarmed an' helpless, wafts him hence."

"That's our story! Let's stick to it."

"Good boy, Chuckwalla. Now help me carry Cassie out. I think she's fainted."

"Well, son," Chuckwalla Bill concluded, "the coroner's jury not only exonerates me but calls me a public-sperrited citizen. However, there's one little mystery the coroner asks Modoc to clear up an' that's the mystery of Liberty's empty gun!

"Which that's easily explained, your honor," says Modoc. 'I'd been robbed of a right smart lot o' sleep lately by a squawlin' tomcat, an' the night before this justifiable homicide I plumb empty my forty-five at that cat in self-defense. Bein' powerful sleepy an' lazy I don't reload that night. I'm fixin' to clean an' oil my gun in the mornin'. Come mornin' the lady in the case arrives an' I'm that excited I clear forget I've ever wore a gun. When Liberty appropriates my weepoon he sees empty shells in the cylinder if he investigates at all, but them little pits in the head, made by the firin' pin, wouldn't mean nothin' to a professor o' music.'

"Which you took a long chance in tellin' him to commence firin'," says the coroner. 'How do you know he don't reload your gun?'

"Me, I'm a gamblin' fool," says Modoc. 'When the odds is even an' I stand to win a big bet I ain't never averse to crowdin' my hand. They got to see me. I'm that curious I crave to know. An' besides an' moreover, your honor,' says Modoc, 'even if his gun is loaded I got an ace coppered. I happen to be aware that Chuckwalla is actin' as lookout on my game. I happen to know Chuckwalla's fully dressed, an' I *happen* to know that any time that *hombre* shoots at anything he hits it.'

"Which the case is dismissed," says the coroner. Rising from his throne, he bows low to Cornflower Cassie. 'Madam,' says he, 'may I ask when you aim to spread a layer o' musical culture over Coolgardie?'

"Mr. Robley will arrange the date, sir.'

"Which there ain't going to be no concert," says

Modoc Bill, 'owin' to the fact that this here Fido Achates o' mine ain't shootin' quite as good lately as he was. First he plumb eliminates the best accompanist in California; then, he tries wing shootin' as the diseased is saggin', an' on account o' not allowin' for windage he clean misses the target an' rips a row o' teeth out o' the finest piano in California.'

" 'Which he's as destructive as a monkey,' says the coroner, 'an' if I'd known that two minutes ago I'd have asked the jury to hold him for wilful murder.' "

Chuckwalla Bill lay back in his blankets and from his silence I knew the tale had been told. However, I could not forbear one more question. So I ended:

"What became of Modoc Bill and Cornflower Cassie?"

"They was married an' lived happy ever afterward. Good night!"

Ballarat Bob's Romance

JUST before sunset we came out upon a piñon-clad mesa in the Toquinas. There was grass for the burros, plenty of fuel, and a little spring welling from a crevice in the rocky bench above us; so Chuckwalla Bill declared we would hole up there for the night. Far below us, however, I could discern a cluster of houses straggling up and down a long, winding gulch which opened out into the desert of Big Smoky Valley. In the foreground stood a large white building with a cupola, and a flagstaff on the cupola; wherefore I knew it at once for the principal hotel of the town, and in consequence of this I suggested that we continue on and engage rooms in that hotel.

"Sho," said Chuckwalla Bill in his gentle, soothing way, "it's supper time, but you don't see no smoke risin' from that camp, do you, son?"

I had not noted the absence of smoke, but now that I did, Chuckwalla's preference for the mesa was explained.

"Fair Piñon, loveliest village o' the plains," the old prospector declaimed. "She was a little old camp while she lasted—but she don't last long. I reckon it's nigh on six years since Piñon petered out."

While he hobbled the jacks, I examined Piñon through my field-glasses. Below the town proper there were hundreds of piles of gravel, gravel-bins, sluice-boxes, and hoist-houses; and after a while I saw that there were neither doors nor windows in the white hotel.

"Wa-ll," Chuckwalla queried ruminatively as he burrowed in the kyacks for some provender, "are you ready with a death certificate for Piñon?"

"Piñon was a placer camp," I replied, "and when the gold fever had run its course, she was too debilitated to survive."

"Right the very first time," he answered; and that night across the camp-fire, he told me this tale of Piñon.

I reckon I never told you about the old boom days in Piñon [began Chuckwalla Bill] although mebbe that's becuz there ain't much to tell. Piñon is what folks calls a wildcat camp, which the same is a misnomer, any kind of a cat having nine lives, while Piñon has but one, an' that a short an' merry one.

Pore old Piñon! She ain't got nothin' back of her when the streak o' pay gravel in the gulch pinches out, an' when the last bucketful is h'isted an' washed, there ain't no incentive for nobody to linger; so all hands evacuates, leavin' the camp, as Doc Bleeker would say, "to settle into the dust o' the ages." Now, when the snow drives the wild hosses down out o' this range into Big Smoky Valley, more'n likely you'll find a passel o' them foolish foals herdin' for shelter in Ballarat Bob's gamblin' hall or breastin' up agin the bar in the Hotel Metropole—which in her prime there's enough champagne sold across that bar to fill the Erie Canal. An' tomorrer mornin' when we're passin' through an' look in at the Rat Trap, it's ten to one we see a gopher snake or a rattler go slitherin' through a knothole in the floor where oncet the lords and ladies o' Piñon, as Doc Bleeker used to say, "tripped the light bombastic toe." The reason we don't go down there this evenin' is because the old camp's filled with a lot o' memories for me, an' besides, there ain't nothin' lonelier than the

place where man has lived an' loved an' gone away from. Piñon don't last more'n three years, but while she lasts she don't give back no change. I'm there from start to finish, an' I pull out about as rich as I go in, unless I count as assets a heap o' experience in human natur' an' placer minin', an' the acquaintance o' Ballarat Bob. It's at Piñon that me an' Ballarat Bob throws in together on a little philanthropy deal. We wash a deal of pay dirt, but in the end we strike bed-rock, although, as Doc Bleeker says at the time, the ends justifies the means. And in all lines of business a fellow has to figure on a certain percentage of losses.

Who is this Ballarat Bob? Wa-ll, son, he's a professional gambler, a man close up to the forty mark, I reckon, inclined to be stout an' lazier'n a lizzard until somebody tries to presume on his good natur' an' tromp on him, when it seems as if he's the wrong man to monkey with. He's a plain dresser, is Ballarat—what you-all might call unostentacy—an' if ever I meet up with a man wearin' a plain face, it's him. He's a brick-top, with buttermilk eyes an' a nose o' no particular importance, while his lower jaw always reminds me o' the lid of a Saratogy trunk. An' freckies! Son, old Mother Natur' don't throw no bran in Ballarat Bob's face. No, sir! She just naturally pelts him with ginger-snaps. Then she plants a crop o' red hair over the back o' the mos' beautiful hands I ever see on a human bein', as if she's sorter regrettin' this slight attraction, an' as a final touch, she equips him with a voice like the rumblin's an' grumblin's of a disconcerted bull two mile away an' down in a cañon. I reckon the only thing Ballarat Bob has to keep from frightenin' little children to death is a smile that never wears off. Why, when his smile's full-grown, there's a glory in Ballarat Bob's face that's like sunup in Big Smoky.

Doc Bleeker, he's nothin' but an' ol'-time minin'-camp doctor that's so honest an' human he cusses hell outter his patients when they make him mad, in consequence of which he can't survive in a community where he's opposed by these slick, diplomatic young doctors o' the new school. Also the Doc has a habit o' doctorin' people an' neglectin' to send in his bill for professional services; but seein' as how he's one o' the best faro players I ever met up with, mebbe he figgers sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. All I know about the Doc is that he's a philosopher an' a scholar an' a gentleman who holds everybody's respect an' confidence, an' when he ain't patchin' up a patient or attendin' a lodge meetin' he's hangin' around Ballarat Bob's layout whilin' away the tejum of existence.

Ballarat Bob lopes into Piñon hard on the heels o' the first rush, an' *muy pronto* he has his gamblin'-house concession staked out in the same buildin' with the camp's most pree-tentious café. I'm in mebbe three days ahead o' Ballarat an' stakes me a good claim down in the gulch. In about a month I've sunk a shaft to bed-rock, cut the gravel strata an' commenced to drift. Another month, an' I'm takin' out an average o' three hundred dollars a day—so naturally it ain't long after I wash my first bin o' gravel till me an' Ballarat Bob meets professionally. When I got money, I'm never averse to bustin' a lance with the fickle jade o' Fortune, as Doc Bleeker used to say. Ballarat is dealin' his own game. For case-keeper he has in his employ a pale youth o' no particular depth or balance an' a confirmed user o' tailor-made cigareets. While I don't hold no aversion to this case-keeper, somethin' tells me he's at home with any kind of a deck an' that also he's more or less instantaneous. As events turn out, I'm right both ways.

Now, there's lately come to Piñon a young feller by the name o' Clem Hardy. Clem's been born an' bred on the Comstock, an' since he's worked underground in the Mexican at Virginia City ever since he's big enough to earn a dollar, it follers naturally that he don't carry no more light in his intellecks than the law allows. Until he comes to Piñon, the biggest money he ever sees is five dollars a day as shift boss, an' on that an' the strength of all the good looks that Ballarat Bob's been denied, he weds a girl that's been teachin' school over in Gold Hill. In the course o' time he's blessed with a son. His wife's prettier'n a chestnut filly, an' socially an' intellectually she grades fifteen hands higher'n Clem. Also she's got what Clem don't possess, an' that's a pantin' ambition to get her husband out from underground an' prod him along until he makes somethin' more of himself than a hard-rock miner. So she saves Clem's wages for him an' schemes to make one dollar do the work of three or four, an' about the time the Piñon excitement breaks out, she says to Clem:

"Clem, quit your job. We got five hundred dollars saved up, so let's light out for Piñon, stake a claim an' be our own man. You're worth more'n day wages, but you'll never get it unless you take a chance."

Wa-ll, Clem he hesitates to burn his bridges behind him, but she keeps a-proddin', an' finally he quits his job, an' him an' the wife an' the kid comes traipsin into Piñon an' pitch their tent right alongside mine. I'm dog-tired that night an' roll into my blankets right after supper, but the little feller keeps yowlin' an' his little mother keeps a-croonin' to him till I'm plumb discouraged about gettin' any sleep. So I sneak out an' go up-town, where I git into a grapple with Ballarat Bob an' win two thousand-odd dollars; an' along in the shank o' the forenoon when I come back to my wickiup

for my missin' sleep, I meet Mrs. Hardy an' she apologizes on behalf of her progeny. I'm attracted to her in a gentlemanly sorter way, for she's a mighty superior woman, an' aside from a little yowlin' now an' then, her kid walks right into my heart, an' in forty-eight hours I'm what you might call the old family friend.

Seein' Clem settin' around, sorter sizin' up the pot, I offer him a job on my claim. He's for takin' it, but his wife won't let him, an' it's then I learn she's dead stuck on Clem gettin' a claim of his own an' workin' it. I explain to her that all the good ground is took up, but she says somebody will go bust an' want to sell on terms, or somebody'll die before completin' his assessment work, an' mebbe they'll get their chance. At any rate, she'll wait a month an' see.

This sperrit arouses my admiration for the little lady an' causes me to keep my eyes so wide open for Clem that it ain't no time until I seen an openin' for the Hardy family. There's a feller right below me that's staked a claim an' done his assessment work, but he's too lazy an' dissolute to work it. He thinks the ground is good, but he don't know for sure, because he ain't tapped the pay gravel, an' I get the notion mebbe he'll unload at a fair price. I sound him out, an' he asks five thousand, on liberal terms, which the same bein' a low price, I close up with him then an' there. Then I offer the claim to Clem for what it costs me, but the price scares him, an' come to find out, they ain't only got about four hundred dollars left out o' their savings, an' little Mrs. Hardy 'lows as how they'll have to wait for a cheaper claim.

"Wa-ll," I says, "I'm two thousand ahead on account o' the little feller keepin' me awake the first night you come, so we'll figger you've made the first payment down. Clem, you bet that four hundred on development

work on the claim, an' if you don't strike nothin' before you go broke, I'll give you a five-dollar-a-day job an' take the claim back."

She gives me a grateful look I wouldn't have traded for forty claims, an' the follerin' mornin' Clem's peggin' away at the bottom of his shaft, which he ain't sunk six feet until he taps pay gravel an' turns up a six-hundred-dollar nugget. Right away Clem's deluged with offers to sell his claim, so he comes to me an' offers me a thousand dollars down—four hundred cash an' the six-hundred-dollar nugget—to give him a deed to the claim, an' he gives me a first mortgage to protect me on the four thousand dollars still due. I'm for accommodatin' him, when she gives me the wink not to. Clem, he's a heap disgusted, but when he goes away, his wife says he's had an offer of eight thousand dollars an' is for sellin' an' takin' his profit. She figgers if he works the claim he'll make a hundred thousand—an' so do I, for that matter.

By the time Clem has his shaft timbered an' commences to drift, his wife borrsers an' ol' hoss-whim an' a jackass from me to h'ist the gravel. She's out there in the sun, day in an' day out, wallopin' my jack around in a circle an' doin' a man's work, an' when Clem's ready money is gone an' he ain't got no pumps nor equipment, I loan him the money to get what he needs. It ain't no time till he's cut a wet channel, which gives him all the water he needs for washin' his dirt, an' first thing I know he's paid me back the loan an' bought a gasoline hoist, ore buckets, an Alaska tram an' what-all—the very latest equipment. In three months he's got twenty-five men workin' for him, doin' three shifts an' taking out five hundred dollars a day net. An' the day he pays me for the claim an' I give him a deed, there ain't a happier man or woman in Piñon than Clem

Hardy an' his wife. On account o' me bein' the responsible party, I'm some popular, an' Mrs. Hardy an' the kid calls me Uncle Billy. She sorter looks out for me like a daughter, an' I reckon I ain't had cookin' like hers since Piñon went bust.

However, as Doc Bleeker would say, there's a shadder on their hearthstone. Clem's one o' these here fellers that can't stand prosperity. While he's making day wages underground, he's content to let his wife handle the family finances, but the minute he's on Easy Street, seems as if he gets the notion he's a financier.

Yes, sir, Clem's all het up with the notion that he's a self-made man. He sorter forgets about his wife borrowin' my whim an' my burro Aphrodite an' drivin' Aphrodite in the sun, roun' an' roun' in a circle, h'istin' gravel an' waste. He gets too proud to build a pine shanty an' live in it—so he moves his family up to the Hotel Metropole an' has champagne at his meals. Also he hires a mine superintendent at three hundred dollars a month to look after his claim, while he hangs around up-town, a-braggin' an' talkin' large an' lettin' folks know how much money he's got.

"Which I'll have a hundred thousand dollars in bank in six months," he says one night.

"An' which I'll shake you the dice, one flop, for that hundred thousand when you get it," says Ballarat Bob, an' Clem shuts up.

Of course, with gamblin' an' drinkin' an' carousin' the principal amusement of Piñon in them days, it ain't long before Clem is one o' the boys. Gamblin' is his downfall, however, although he starts fallin' on champagne at eight dollars a quart. He bucks most every game in camp an' always loses, but finally he gets fascinated by Ballarat Bob's homely face an' takes to settin' in regular at the faro layout. At first he just

pikes around, but finally one night he buys a stack o' browns. I'm there at the time, whilin' away the tejum, an' I see Ballarat calmly sizin' up Clem Hardy as he places his bets. Finally, says Ballarat Bob:

"Brother! Injuns, eejits, an' drunks is barred from my game, so until you sober up an' get into condition to play, you'd better slide off that stool an' give the Doc a chance at my skelp. I like to win money, but friskin' a man that ain't quite sober is out o' my line. *Vamos, amigo!* or in plain English, get to hell out o' here an' go home to your wife an' family."

Clem he blusters, but Ballarat's big jaw sticks out an' his eyes ain't healthy to look at, an' finally Clem concludes to accept his advice. But he's back at Ballarat's game the follerin' night, as sober as a muley cow, so Ballarat lets him play. For mebbe a week this continues, an' then Ballarat decides he'll bar him again. He's more or less loud, is Clem, an' he disturbs the reflections o' Ballarat's more dignified customers. So Ballarat, which he's allers a gentlemanly sort o' feller, draws Clem to one side an' asks him, as a special favor, not to come around any more.

"Why?" says Clem. It was just like him to ask an embarrassin' question like that.

"Wa-ll," says Ballarat Bob, "for one thing you're too loud an' various, an' for another thing, the good Lord don't never intend you for a faro player, an' your futility sorter wounds my notions o' sportsmanship."

"Why ain't I as good a faro player as Chuckwalla Bill or Doc Bleeker?" says Clem, all bristles an' dignity.

"Becuz," says Ballarat Bob, "you're a damn fool an' the whole camp knows it. You ain't got sense enough to pound sand in a rat-hole. Becuz faro is a science, an' you ain't no scientist. Becuz you're a pig with a gold ring in your nose, Clem, an' I reckon it's my Christian

duty to tell you so—an' it ain't often that I condescend to pick a fight with my bread an' butter! Clem, ol' sport, listen to me: I been a gambler since I was big enough to shoot craps, an' I was six years old then an' sellin' papers down in Silver City, New Mexico. There ain't nothin' in buckin' a gambler, so that's why I let folks buck me. Now, you just quit gamblin', Clem, an' quit buyin' champagne for people you won't let your wife associate with, an' lay up some money agin the day when your claim peters out. I been in placer camps before, Clem, an' none of 'em lasted longer'n the pay gravel."

"But you're runnin' the only faro game in the camp that's above suspicion," says Clem, not havin' the moral courage to cuss Ballarat for his straight talk.

"Thanks. That's true, Clem, but that ain't no sign you're goin' to get an even break. Between me an' you, I wouldn't be runnin' a faro game if the splits an' percentages didn't give me a clear advantage over the men that buck my game."

Does Clem take his well-meant advice? Not a bit of it. For three nights he's hanging around Ballarat's game, cold-sober an' silent as an Injun, lookin' on at the play. But as Doc Bleeker says it's a axiom o' human nature that when you deny a man a simple thing he don't need, he just pants to have it; so presently Clem slides in on a vacant stool, passes over two hundred dollars an' says quiet-like:

"A stack of browns, Ballarat."

Ballarat just glares at him, but as there's half a dozen men deep in the game an' he don't care to raise no disturbance, he gives in to Clem, who plays his two hundred dollars in silence, loses it, gets up an' goes home without havin' said another word. Ballarat, seein' as how the feller means well, looks at me an' Doc Bleeker.

"The bars are down, boys," he says. "Somebody's going to get that boy's money, so it might as well be me."

So Clem Hardy starts gamblin' regularly with Ballarat Bob, an' for the next month, barrin' the fact that the title to the claim is vested in Clem, Ballarat collects all the dividends. An' the more Clem loses, the keener he gets for faro. He neglects his claim, an' seein' this, his superintendent begins to think he owns an interest in the mine; so every evenin' when he makes the clean-up he places a mental bet with himself as to how much the clean-up runs—an' all over that he keeps! He ain't stole more'n a thousand dollars until I'm suspicious, an' on my recommendation, Mrs. Hardy fires him, so every evenin' after that I help her make the clean-up an' sorter look out for things. She's a superior young woman, an' I feel a heap o' respect an' admiration for her; while she's a business woman from the word go, she's that sweet an' tolerant an' forgivin' o' Clem it drives me wild to see he don't appreciate her like he'd ought to.

Things breeze along like this for another month, an' then along about two o'clock one morning a feller comes into Ballarat Bob's where Clem's playin' faro. "Clem," he says, "your wife is standing down at the corner an' wants that you should come home."

"You tell her," says Clem, sorter savage, "that I'll come home when I get good an' ready."

I see Ballarat Bob give Clem a look that'd wake anybody else up out of a sound sleep. I'd had to loan Mrs. Hardy money enough to meet the monthly payroll that day an' Ballarat Bob knew it—him an' me bein' friendly—an' for a minute I thought he was goin' to hit Clem. Then he calls his relief man, while he walks to the end

o' the bar, totes up a column o' figgers in a little memorandum book an' writes a check on the First National Bank over in Cinnabar. Then he nods to me to foller, an' walks out.

"Chuckwalla," he says when we reach the street, "I wish you'd interduce me to Mrs. Hardy."

I can see Clem's wife standin' in the shadder o' the porch o' the general store, waitin' for her doggone husband, so we come strollin' up casual, an' I interduce Ballarat Bob, who holds out his hand to shake. But Mrs. Hardy can't seem to see Ballarat's hand. She gives him a scornful look an' says:

"So this is the man that's leadin' my poor husband to ruin."

Ballarat bows low. "The same, identical, wuthless feller, ma'am," he says. "When a woman sends word into my deadfall at this hour o' the mornin' for her husband to come home, it's a sign she's gettin' plumb desperate; an' when that husband sends back word he'll come when he gets good an' ready, it's a sign his wife has lost control over him. I been a-figgerin' that'd be about the way this deal would wind up. Me an' Chuckwalla has discussed you an' the little feller once or twice, an' for your sake I've done my best to get shet o' Clem, short o' closin' my game an' leavin' camp, but it ain't no use argyin' with him, Mrs. Hardy. Dealin' faro gives a man a heap o' insight into human nature, an' quite a spell back I made up my mind Clem ain't goin' to be headed until he's back underground again at five dollars a day."

Ballarat pauses, embarrassed, an' smiles sorter foolish, a-lookin' down at his toes.

"Fact is, Mrs. Hardy, I ain't been ruinin' Clem at all. He's just been pilin' up a savin's account with me for his banker—only he don't know it. You see, Mrs.

Hardy, takin' money from Clem at faro is like spankin' a baby, becuz you got things all your own way. So when I see the way Clem's headed after he strikes it rich, I keep track of his losses an' mine whenever he bucks my game. Tonight I balance the account an' I'm twenty-two thousand dollars to the good—twenty-two thousand even, because me an' Clem never does business in odd numbers." He reaches into his pocket an' hauls out the check. "An' if you'll step up to the payin' teller's winder at the Cinnabar National Bank, ma'am," he says, bowin' low an' handin' her the check, "the accommodatin' gent in the steel cage'll honor this here to the full face value."

She takes the check an' looks at it, an' then she looks up at Ballarat Bob. "Oh, Mr. Ballarat Bob," she quavers. "Mr. Ballarat Bob! Will you ever forgive me for bein' so rude when Uncle Billy interduces us?" An' then she's leanin' her pretty head up agin one o' the uprights o' the porch an' cryin' fit to break her heart.

"Sho," says Ballarat, "I wouldn't cry no more about it if I was you." An' he smiles until his face is plumb good-lookin'. "Now, you just stand pat, Mrs. Hardy, an' listen to my program. As a usual thing, I ain't no human Christmas tree, but yours bein' a special case, there ain't no thanks comin' to me for doin' the right thing. My old daddy—which he's gone now an' I oughtn't to say it—was the spittin' image o' Clem Hardy when he had money in his pocket. An' when he didn't, mother took in washin'. Mother was proud an' spunky like you, an' me bein' the only child, she had hopes o' makin' a doctor out o' me, only the old gentleman spoils every plan she ever makes, an' the result is that I turn out a gambler. Consequently when Chuck-walla tells me you got a lad risin' three year old that you're figgerin' on sendin' to college an' makin' a doctor

out of—wa-ll, I look at Clem, an' there he sets, just a-smashin' your air-castles as fast as you build 'em; an' pretty soon the claim pinches out, Clem's broke, an' up jumps the devil."

She reaches out gropin' for his hand, which she'd refused a minute before, an' I can see Ballarat sorter gulp as he takes it in both o' hisn.

"Mrs. Hardy, ma'am," he says, "this camp is goin' to be the ruination o' Clem if he remains rich an' idle. It's my advice that you pick on him to sell. Clem, he's lost interest in hard work, an' he needs the money for gamblin'. When he's ready to sell, you tip Chuckwalla off, an' me an' Chuckwalla an' you'll make up a jack-pot an' buy him out in Chuckwalla's name. But after he sells the claim, don't you insist on him leavin' the camp. Lemme have a hack at him. It won't be long until I have the money we've paid out for the claim; then I'll give it all to you; you'll settle with me an' Chuckwalla; Chuckwalla'll give you a deed to the claim, an' then you give him a salary for lookin' after your mine.

"Clem needn't know anything about this deal at all until he's had a good beatin' an' feels sore an' repentant. When he finds himself flat busted an' down to day laborin' again, he'll have a chance see how quick his fair-weather friends'll fall away from him. It'll surprise him to learn how few'll lend him money when he's broke, or pay back what he loaned them when he was flush. Then he'll realize the fix he's put you an' the little chap in, an' mebbe the shock'll jar some sense into him an' he'll quit gamblin' an' drinkin'. Perhaps after he's been on the mourners' bench awhile, you might tell him what we've done to him, but at any rate, you've got the family funds in your hands then, an' if you give 'em up to him after that, why, that's your business. In the meantime we'll hope for the best, an'

you needn't worry none about the boy not goin' to college."

"Oh, Mr. Ballarat Bob," she says, grabbin' his hand an' kissin' it, "you're an angel."

"Yes," says Ballarat, "one o' them dark angels, I reckon."

"Never mind the money," she says. "Never mind the claim. Just save my pore, misguided husband for me, an' I'll pray for you the longest day I live. Oh, Mr. Ballarat Bob, I didn't think there was two such men as you an' Uncle Billy in all this world. My heart's been breakin' for months, an' you've made me so happy I've got to cry."

"Which that remark makes me happier'n you a blamed sight," says Ballarat. "An' I'm only doin' what I wish some low-down gambler an' a worthless old placer miner had done for my mother. She died of her broken heart."

The next thing I'm aware, me an' Ballarat is standin' there alone, with Ballarat lookin' thoughtful at the back of his hand where she'd kissed it, an' mutterin' somethin' about pearls cast before swine—which Clem Hardy was sure some swine!

Well, son, the program works out like a fresh-greased buggy. Ballarat don't make no mistake sizin' up his man, an' before two weeks is up I've bought Clem's claim from him for forty thousand dollars. Mrs. Hardy chips in twenty thousand an' I give Clem a mortgage on the claim for twenty thousand to secure what's still due. In a month Clem has lost his twenty thousand to Ballarat Bob, an' when Ballarat confides to me that his victim is down to silver dollars ag'in, I walk in one night an' build a fire under Clem.

"Clem," I says, "that certainly was a most marvelous

rich claim you sold me. I wouldn't take two hundred thousand dollars for it, an' in order to keep the interest from accumulatin' on the mortgage, here's a certificate o' dee-posit on the Cinnabar National Bank for the principal an' interest; so if you'll just put your John Hancock on this release o' mortgage, I reckon we can terminate our business affairs here an' now."

Clem signs the release o' mortgage; I endorse the certificate o' dee-posit over to him; an' Clem in turn endorses the certificate over to Ballarat.

"There," he says, "put that in your cash drawer an' I'll draw agin it as I require. I'm gamblin' tonight for the last time, an' if you want my trade, Ballarat Bob, you'll elevate the limit. My luck can't hold so poor forever, an' when I get up from this session I'll be broke or I'll have made a killin'."

"Wa-ll, Clem," says Ballarat Bob, "seein' as you've got blood in your eye, we'll accommodate the house rules to your changed financial status. The limit is the little, twinklin' stars. Blues, I suppose—a hundred each?"

Clem's agreeable, an' the game starts. It ain't no time till word o' what's goin' on gets around an' there's a big crowd millin' around the faro table, watchin' the contest between Clem Hardy an' Ballarat Bob. Clem realizes he's a sort o' gamblified hero for the night, an' he's swimmin' in a sea o' cheap public admiration an' likes it. Also, when he starts losin' steadily, he ain't got the moral courage to quit with forty men lookin' on, an' as a result, about eight o'clock next mornin' he's a pauper. When his money is all et up, he tries to play markers, but Ballarat won't stand for that; whereupon Clem loses his nerve an', gettin' ugly, declares as how Ballarat Bob has run a sandy on him.

Ballarat don't take no offense. He knows Clem is

plumb excited an' desperate, so he just shoves the deck over to Clem, together with all the reserve decks in his cash drawer. "Get an expert to examine 'em for sanded spots an' roughened edges, Clem," he says. "An' when he produces the evidence I'll give you back your money an' leave camp. Remember, I allers told you not to play faro bank."

Clem gets up, white-faced an' tremblin', an' goes out; the crowd scatters, an' Ballarat goes up to the hotel an' turns in, for he's due to go on duty ag'in at six o'clock. An' at six o'clock he's dealin' to me an' Doc Bleeker—we allers like to play early in the even' before the rush commences—when Clem Hardy comes a-strollin' in. He's been drinkin' an' there's an ugly look in his eyes.

Presently Doc drops his limit for the day, an' sets back to make room. At the same time I get up, aimin' to step to the bar an' buy a cigar, an' that's the time Clem Hardy chooses to move into action. There's nobody between him an' Ballarat Bob now, so he draws a gun an' goes to work.

You'll remember I mentioned the case-keeper as a youth that impressed me as being sorter instantaneous? Well, this lad ain't certain whether Clem is tryin' for him or Ballarat Bob or both—an' he don't care. At a time like that I suppose it's up to a feller to make a quick decision, so this here case-keeper just naturally pulls an' lets her fly.

"Bust his shootin' arm," yells Ballarat as he goes backward onto the floor. "Don't kill the danged eejit!"

Mebbe the case-keeper tries to obey orders. Mebbe he don't, figgerin' that it's better to be sure than sorry; but be that as it may, when the shootin' is over the case-keeper has a furrow through his skelp an' a hole in his left shoulder. Ballarat Bob is unhurt an' Clem

Hardy is lyin' on the floor, with an empty gun in his hand.

Ballarat Bob crawls out from under the faro table, dusts his hat, which there's a hole through the crown, shakes the fragments of his gold watch out of his vest pocket, which there's a forty-four bullet imbedded in the works, looks from the case-keeper to Clem Hardy, with Doc Bleeker bendin' over the latter, an' then across at me. He shakes his head sorrowfully, an' then he looks down at the floor, becuz there's tears in his eyes.

Doc Bleeker is the first to speak. "The operation was a unqualified success, Ballarat," he says, "but the patient died."

Ballarat comes across to me, "I give her the twenty thousand this afternoon," he says. "I've done my best, an' I think she'll realize it, but I'd be obliged if you was to take her the news first, Chuckwalla. This philanthropy job of ourn has most certainly back-fired!"

Chuckwalla yawned, glanced up at the stars, then sighed deeply. "An' that," he concluded, "was one job I didn't enjoy. Son, I'm sleepy. We'll go down into Piñon tomorrow an' look the old camp over. We'll set for a spell in Ballarat Bob's old gamblin' den an' then I'll tell you the rest o' the story."

Next morning when we entered the ghost camp, a remark which the old prospector had made the previous night, recurred to me with a new significance: "There ain't nothin' lonelier than the place where man has lived an' loved an' died an' gone away from."

Instinctively, upon entering Piñon, one felt the truth of this desert philosophy. Even I, who had not known the camp in the brave old days, seemed to sense the touch of vanished hands, to catch fleeting glimpses of wraiths of the past; a poignant sense of the fallibility

and mortality of man oppressed me. Chuckwalla Bill, too, seemed awed and sobered, as he paused before a long, low frame building with a high false front, meditatively bit a neat crescent out of his plug of chewing tobacco and pointed to a sign, now almost indecipherable, extending across the face of the building:

ANY MAN—ANY GAME

"That there used to be Ballarat Bob's hang-out—him as I was tellin' you about last night, that me an' Doc Bleeker helps to strip a human vacuum by the name o' Clem Hardy of all his worldly goods an' gear, after we've all made up our minds Clem ain't to be trusted with 'em, an' that his wife ought to be made his gardeen."

We left the jacks in the middle of Main Street and entered Ballarat Bob's late hang-out. Chuckwalla tossed his hat on the warped and cracked bar, against which he leaned his back and gazed across the room. "Right over yonder Ballarat had his faro table," he said; "there's the dais where the lookout used to set, an' right here where I'm standin', an' in about this position, was where Clem Hardy stood, when he decides to provide an unexpected climax to our little adventure in philanthropy by usin' Ballarat for a target, but clean overlooks the case-keeper, who, as I told you last night, unlimbers an' wafts Clem into the Happy Huntin' Grounds."

Chuckwalla sighed and shook his head, then turned to glance into the cracked mirror behind the bar, as if he half expected some spook barkeeper to voice the ancient formula: "What'll be your pleasure, Chuckwalla?"

"But what happened to Clem's wife, Chuckwalla?"

Well [said Chuckwalla—he had climbed upon the bar and sat there dangling his legs] you'd think as how one adventure would have cured me an' Ballarat Bob, when for all our good intentions, we culminate the deal in a funeral an' a broken heart. But no! Before Clem Hardy is fairly underground, his widder has writ a note to all three of us, declarin' as how she realizes the circumstances perfectly an' don't hold us accountable no-how for her widderhood; which epistle causes us to arch our necks an' tails an' begin to speculate on how we can serve Mrs. Hardy for absolvin' us.

Well, sir, it ain't a month after the lady's quit wearin' widder's weeds till me an' Ballarat Bob an' Doc Bleeker had it brought to our attention as how her bank-roll, for which we're responsible, is threatened by a man that's lower'n snake—an' a snake crawls on its belly. Consequently us three, settin' as a committee on credentials, files our horns an' gores this low-down cuss; which is makin' the statement that Colonel Elmer Poundstone is the most wuthless man I ever meet up with. An' I don't omit dance-hall entertainers, barroom moochers, an' white men that hive up in campoodies with Injuns.

Nobody knows where the colonel hails from. He just drifts into camp with the rest o' the people an' hangs out his shingle as a counselor-at-law. On the side he's app'inted district recorder, the governor hands him out a commission as notary public, an' by an' large he's doin' right well about the time us three have our attention called to his activities.

"Which this Colonel Poundstone is the glass o' fashion an' the mold o' form," says Doc Bleeker. "The only thing I got against him is the fact that he says he's a Southern gentleman an' says it too often! I'm from the south o' Mason an' Dixon's line myself, an' when I

was a young feller, Southern gentlemen didn't have to advertise that they was gentlemen. By livin' up to the code, they allowed as how folks would take it for granted."

"Doc," I says, "has it occurred to you that the colonel is payin' court to Mrs. Hardy?"

"It has," replies Doc. "She's the prettiest, the best eddicated an' the wealthiest woman in camp, an' on the face o' things, the colonel bein' the most elegant an' accomplished male person hereabouts, it stands to reason they see somethin' in each other—"

"I know what that Poundstone man sees," says Ballarat thoughtfully. "He sees a fortune me an' Chuckwalla labored to produce." An' he takes to shufflin' a stack o' chips with one hand an' whistlin' "The Suwanee River" sorter sad an' low. Finally he looks up at me an' Doc. "Gentlemen," he says, "I knew a hotel clerk down in San Francisco once that could tell a hotel beat the minute the feller reached for the pen in the potato. I'm blessed with some o' them divinatory powers myself. I'm gambler enough to know a tin-horn, short-card, no-good skunk when I see one, an' that description fits the colonel like a tailor-made suit. Chuckwalla, I'd most certainly grieve to see your adopted nephew beaten out o' the schoolin' his ma's been saving her money for."

I know what he's drivin' at. Mrs. Hardy's kid always calls me "Uncle Billy." Ballarat realizes I'm the family friend an' adviser, an' on account o' my position that-a-way I'm privileged to do some straight talkin' to Mrs. Hardy if the occasion ever rises.

"I'll remember that, Ballarat," I says, an' that ended our conversation, as the Doc would say, for the nonce.

It's mebbe a year after Clem Hardy's removal when one day Doc Bleeker comes lopin' into Ballarat Bob's

in the shank o' the late afternoon. Ballarat's place is deserted, an' me an' him are playin' crib for the drinks, when Doc busts in on us like a cyclone.

"Gentlemen," he says, "the market on Cinnabar Consolidated has gone to glory. She's dropped two points—an' me spraddlin' the market on the local exchange, playin' for a sharp rise."

"Sho," says Ballarat, "whoever in Piñon has been holdin' enough Cinnabar Consolidated to dump it overboard an' break the price two points?"

"Colonel Elmer Poundstone," says Doc.

Ballarat Bob shakes his head. "Come again, Doc," he says. "The colonel can prove an alibi. He ain't got any Cinnabar Con. If he did, he'd have advertised the fact that he was holdin' a block of it. He can't keep his mouth shut about anything that'll give folks an idee he's rich an' prosperous."

"Wa-ll," says Doc, "mebbe he's handlin' it for a client—"

"Look here, Doc," I says, "how'd you find this out?"

"Why, I'm in my broker's office, discussin' the break, when Poundstone comes in an' I hear him askin' the bookkeeper if the check for his Cinnabar Con. stock was ready yet. That's how I know."

Doc's always tinkerin' with stocks. He's mebbe carryin' five hundred shares of Cinnabar Con. at ten cents a share, an' the break in the market has cost him ten dollars in paper profits, but it might just as well have been a million, becuz the Doc takes on just as hard, a-cussin' Poundstone for a fool an' a knave for sellin' now. I leave him an' Ballarat discussin' the market, while I cross over to the hotel to see Mrs. Hardy, for I been doin' a little tall thinkin'. There's been fifty thousand shares o' Cinnabar Con. sold on the Piñon exchange, an' in a camp like that pretty nearly every-

body knows what stocks the other feller is holdin' an' I know Mrs. Hardy is holdin' a hundred thousand shares o' Cinnabar Consolidated. I'd had a straight tip, an' on my say-so she'd invested ten thousand dollars—one hundred thousand shares at ten cents. It's in ten certificates of ten thousand shares each, endorsed in blank by the former owner, an' I don't take the trouble to have these certificates transferred to her name on the books o' the company. I'm careless thataway in business matters.

Wa-ll, son, I think of these things now, an' I'm worried. None knows better'n me the court the colonel's been payin' to Mrs. Hardy, an' I happen to know he's done a little legal business for her. I can't get the notion out o' my head that he's induced her to sell her Cinnabar stock, an' if that's so, I'm feelin' a little hurt an' out in the cold.

I find her on the porch of the Hotel Metropole, all dressed up for goin' away.

"Uncle Billy," she says, "I'm so glad you've come. I'm goin' down to San Francisco for a few weeks, an' I've been lookin' for you, to ask you to keep your eye on my claim until I get back."

"An' I been lookin' for you," I says. "About that Cinnabar stock o' yourn; you didn't never tell anybody I advised you to buy that stock, did you, Mrs. Hardy?"

"Why, no," she says. "What makes you ask?"

"Wa-ll," I says, "it's slumped a mite, an' some o' the boys that knows I'm holdin' a little of it have been twittin' me about my jedgment. If she drops lower an' they found out I've roped you in on a loss—"

"Uncle Billy," she says, "you just shet up. You know very well I would't tell anybody if I lost every cent I invested."

"That's comfortin'," I says. "You ain't a-goin' to

lose. Some of these fly brokers is puttin' over wash-sales, tryin' to depress the stock, so I thought I'd warn you not to worry. I think she'll drag a little an' then go sky high, so mebbe you'd better leave them ten certificates with me while you're away. If the market takes a sudden turn, I think we'd better unload an' take our profit."

"Why, my attorney, Colonel Poundstone, has the certificates," she says. "I was talkin' with him the other day about ownin' the stock an' he says he'd heard there was a fight on for control of Cinnabar Consolidated, an' he wouldn't be surprised if I'd be approached by one side or the other for my proxy or a proposition to sell at a nice profit. I told him the stock had never been transferred to my name, an' it was not likely anybody would approach me, so at his suggestion I gave him the certificates. He said he was going over to Cinnabar shortly, an' he'll attend to the transfer for me."

"Which the same is a rattlin' good idea, Mrs. Hardy," I says, "an' I'm glad the colonel advised you right. Have a good time while you're away, an' don't worry about the clean-up." I shake hands an' kiss the baby good-by an' go streakin' back to Ballarat Bob's, where I relate all the information I gather.

"She gave him ten certificates, all endorsed in blank by the original owner," says Doc Bleeker, "an' yesterday afternoon five ten-thousand-share blocks is sold on the local exchange at eight cents by Colonel Poundstone. Ballarat, do you smell a rodent?"

"I sure do," says Ballarat, "an' the only way to get the evidence is for you to go up to your broker, Doc, an' buy that whole fifty thousand shares. If he ain't disposed of 'em elsewhere, his client mebbe entertains an offer to turn a quick profit. Offer him ten cents, an' me an' Chuckwalla will produce the money. Ask him

for the same shares he buys on the exchange yesterday, becuz you want certain interested parties to lose track of who's holdin' it. *Sabe usted?*''

Doc is off like a streak. In fifteen minutes he's back for the check, an' shortly thereafter he strolls in an' lays on Ballarat's faro table five of Mrs. Clem Hardy's certificates. It's all the evidence we want, an' there ain't no doubt but what the colonel has committed a breach o' trust an' pocketed four thousand dollars o' Mrs. Hardy's money. I'm for huntin' for him with a gun an' makin' him disgorge, but Ballarat Bob is agin that course.

"He won't run away," says Ballarat, "so we have time to consider what's to be done. He won't leave Piñon until he's unloaded the remainin' fifty thousand shares, an' with Mrs. Hardy leavin' camp for three weeks, he'll figger his secret will be safe until she gets back an' mebbe demands the stock. Three weeks is ample time to trim that felon, an' I'm a-goin' to trim him good an' plenty. Yes, sir, gentlemen, that lamb is sure in for a shearin'."

"How?" says Doc Bleeker.

Ballarat reaches into his drawer an' pulls out a pink check on the First National Bank o' Cinnabar.

"That's the colonel's check," he says. "It's for fifty dollars he loses in the Rat Trap a few days ago, an' then stops payment on, claimin' the faro dealer run a sandy on him. The feller that runs the game was tellin' me about it, an' I happen to know he's runnin' a straight game; I happen to know, also, that the colonel is as good a faro player as ever took a nick out o' my bank-roll, an' when my worthy competitor tells me this fifty is the first money he's won from the colonel since the skunk settled in our midst, I can well believe him. He's frothin' at the mouth to think the colonel's stopped

payment on the check." An' Ballarat Bob gives a gentle little chuckle as if he has a secret he won't tell nobody.

"How'd that piece o' wuthless paper come into your possession, Ballarat?" says the Doc.

"Oh, I give twenty-five dollars for it," says Ballarat. "I got a notion I'll collect it one o' these days, an' it's worth fifty dollars. Why shouldn't I do a little tradin' an' make twenty-five dollars?"

"Which you're talkin' in riddles, Ballarat," I says. "Spread your hand an' let me an' the Doc have a look."

"When a man like the colonel stops payment on a check he issues for his losses in a square gamblin' game," says Ballarat, "it's becuz he's a natural born crook. Still, crook that he is, the colonel wouldn't do a raw job like that if he expected to remain in Piñon. He was fixin' to sell Mrs. Hardy's stock an' skedaddle, but now that she's goin' away I'm bankin' he'll linger in our midst a little longer'n he intended, an' while lingerin' he'll patronize the only other faro dealer in Piñon that's known to be above suspicion. If he can win some money, fair and dandy. If he loses, he'll give a check an' stop payment. Remember, a gamblin' debt ain't collectible in law. Therefore when he comes patronizin' me, I'm goin' to run a sandy on him an' give him all the credit he wants. There's one thing I've noticed about the colonel that makes him my prey. *He'll always play through a deal.*"

"But when he comes to settle up with you, he'll issue one o' them checks," says the Doc, a heap scornful.

"An' then he'll stop payment on it," I says.

"Right. Take the head of the class. But I'll collect the check," says Ballarat. "Now, you two *hombres* pay close attention to me while I give my instructions. I reckon I've got about as sensitive a pair o' fingers as any gent in my profession, an' in my youth I learned

how to deal from a brace deck, just as a matter o' precaution an' never for profit. My case-keeper here is a past master in keepin' crooked cases, although he'd just as soon keep 'em straight when he's workin' for an honest house. However, I've been out o' practice for a number of years, so tonight I'm goin' to be sick an' close down this faro game. But over in my room at the hotel I got an extra faro layout, an' I want you two gents to report there in secret tonight for rehearsal."

"We'll be there at ten o'clock," says the Doc.

"Very well," says Ballarat. "An' in the meantime me an' my case-keeper'll prepare a trained deck."

Wa-ll, son, from ten o'clock that night until sunup, Ballarat Bob an' his case-keeper do a mythical business with me an' the Doc. Ballarat's a little clumsy at first, but the case-keeper keeps wisin' him up, an' me an' Doc does our best to beat the game. In spite of us, however, Ballarat beats us out of thousands o' dollars in stage money, an' along towards mornin' his work is almost perfect. However, he says he's got to have a little more practice, so he's still sick that day, an' the follerin' night we get together in his room for another session. This time we're not allowed to be in on the crooked play at all, an' as a result, although me an' Doc watches Ballarat an' the case-keeper like two cats, we don't detect the dirty work once, an' Ballarat wins from us as often as he pleases.

Ballarat an' his case-keeper sleeps all next day, but come evenin' they appear in the usual place at the gamblin' hall an' open for business. Ballarat 'lows to inquiren' friends that they've et somethin' that disagreed with 'em.

Just before supper me an' the Doc drops in an' starts playin'. We ain't hardly started till the colonel slips in, smilin' an' affable, an' buys a stack. He plays about an

hour with us, an' wins sixty dollars, with Ballarat dealin' from an honest deck. Then the colonel says:

"Wa-ll, Ballarat Bob, I guess we'll settle up. I'm goin' to supper."

"You mean I'll settle up, colonel," says Ballarat, pretendin' he's some put out at losin' again, an' the colonel enjoys this disgust a heap. Then him an' me an' the Doc has a slight libation at the bar, an' the Doc invites us both to dine with him at the Hotel Metropole.

We don't play no more faro that night, but along in the late afternoon next day we all meet up at Ballarat's table again. Ballarat is waitin' for us this time with the trained deck. He graciously permits me to grab off about three hundred dollars, an' the Doc collects nineteen hundred, while Colonel Poundstone is robbed of two hundred even by seven o'clock, when I declare a recess for supper.

"Time for us to settle up, colonel," says Ballarat.

"You mean it's time for me to settle up," says the Colonel pleasantly. "Wa-ll, Ballarat, I won't feel so bad about it as you did yesterday." An' he laughs an' writes a check. Ballarat stuffs it into his drawer, an' the colonel an' Doc Bleeker an' me go off to supper. Doc is some jubilant over his winnin' an' insists on payin' for the dinner again. He buys champagne, an' we all get more or less lit up, until about nine o'clock Doc proposes we go back an' take some more skin off Ballarat Bob. The colonel is agreeable an' back we go.

Ballarat Bob looks up as the three of us come prancin' in.

"Back for more, eh?" he says, good-natured. He unlocks his cash drawer, removes a new deck still sealed with the revenue stamps, unwraps it, shuffles it an' passes it across to Doc Bleeker to cut. Then he shoves it into the little silver case.

"I'll have forty browns," says Doc Bleeker, callin' for exactly the amount the colonel had lost before supper, forty browns bein' worth two hundred dollars, or five dollars each. The Doc is a sharp on what he calls psychology—which as near as I can make out means the implantin' of your idee in the other feller's brain. At any rate, the colonel says he'll take the same, an' so do I. Ballarat passes out the celluloids, an' me an' Doc pays for ours in coin, seein' which the colonel says:

"I'll have to give you my check, Ballarat, although I see you got a sign up on the wall: 'No checks taken—or cashed.'"

"Oh, that's for people we don't know, colonel," says Ballarat. "You can settle when you quit playin'." An' he lays out two brown markers as a memorandum. The colonel acknowledges his appreciation in some flowery language, an' the play commences. Durin' the first deal Ballarat leaves his fortunes, as Doc Bleeker would say, to the whim o' the goddess o' chance, dealin' from a straight deck, an' after the last turn Colonel Elmer Poundstone has before him some three hundred an' fifty dollars. While shufflin' for the next deal, however, I claim the colonel's attention with a story I've heard that afternoon, an' Ballarat drops his hand below the table an' trades the honest deck for the crooked one which he has concealed under his left leg. It's done like that!

O' course, the colonel loses from the first turn, while me an' Doc Bleeker, playin' on Ballarat's money an' bein' the come-ons, are free of his attentions. The way it falls out we actually win a little money by sheer luck, an' once in a while Ballarat lets us win a big pot.

Of course, our luck only tantalizes the colonel, an' between the wine he's drunk an' Ballarat's gentle sarcasm, he declines to quit when his first forty browns

has gone into Ballarat Bob's chip-rack. He buys forty more, an' by the time the deal is finished there's eight markers in the little pile at the right o' the dealer, an' the Colonel is eight hundred dollars in debt to Ballarat Bob, which losses, added to the two-hundred-dollar check he's given Ballarat before supper, totals a thousand dollars.

Now, this is the ticklish point in the program. The colonel figgers that if he quits now he'll have to give Ballarat a check for eight hundred more, an' he quits the evenin' entertainment loser by a thousand dollars unless he stops payment on the checks—and a thousand dollars is a loss he ain't willin' to stand. On the other hand, if he stops payment on a thousand dollars' worth of checks, something tells him he'll have to argue the issue with Ballarat in the smoke, an' the colonel ain't got more'n enough animal courage to spank a baby. Fifty dollars is the limit of the checks he welshes on previously, an' in both cases (we learn he's tried it twice) he contrives to start an argument an' claim foul play. However, he knows he ain't got no chance o' makin' any such claim as that stick in Piñon with reference to Ballarat Bob, who's universally loved an' respected. Besides, with Doc Bleeker an' me in the same game an' winnin', nobody'll believe him, an' so to issue the check means he'll have to get out of Piñon before ever his check comes back dishonored from Cinnabar.

He sits there a minute figgerin' it out, an' Ballarat Bob, winkin' at me an' Doc Bleeker, decides the issue for him. He shoves over forty more browns an' sets aside two more markers, which Poundstone accepts. As Doc Bleeker an' Ballarat explain to me later, there is a psychology to gamblin, an' Ballarat knew the psychological moment to act. A feller that's winnin' is satisfied to place small bets an' rake in a modest profit,

but the feller that's a heavy loser, nine times out o' ten forces his hand, makin' larger an' larger bets an' plungin' like a runaway horse. As the Doc remarks later, the cemetery at Monte Carlo is filled with silent arguments in support o' this theory.

When that stack is gone, the colonel makes his decision. Tomorrow mornin' he'll dump that other fifty thousand shares on the market, clean up an' depart; tonight when he finishes playin' he'll issue Ballarat Bob a check for a keepsake, unless his luck changes an' he quits winner, but in the meantime he'll go as far as Ballarat Bob will let him. We can all see his thoughts racin' up an' down his Adam's apple. He drums a little on the table, coughs once an' says:

"Give me a thousand more."

"Blue—a hundred each?" says Ballarat Bob, polite as a barber.

"Yes. An' what's the limit?"

"When the house is playin' in luck, colonel," says Ballarat, "the limit is whatever the customer cares to make it."

"This game is gettin' over my head," I says. "I feel like a piker."

"Same here," says Doc Bleeker, so we both cash in an' set watchin' Ballarat an' the colonel.

The colonel spreads his blue chips here an' there, coppered or open, he pyramids his bets, doubles an' redoubles, sweats, puffs an' loses—steady an' heavy. As fast as he goes bankrupt, Ballarat says casual an' kindly: "How many?" an' passes over more chips! Son, it's scandalous. Finally it comes to the last turn, with three cards remainin' in the box. The colonel glances at the cases, then at the three blue chips he's got left.

"I'll call the turn, Robert," he says, endeavorin' to appear cheerful. "Trey, jack, king." You understand,

of course, he's endeavorin' to name the exact location of every card in the box. Ballarat turns the cards:

"The turn is jack, king, trey, colonel—good ol' Jack King, the first man hung in Boston—hence the *dinero* belongs to the party o' the first part," says Ballarat, an' rakes in the three blue chips.

The colonel's face is quite a study in mixed emotions, as Doc Bleeker would say. He swallows his tongue a time or two an' then says casual: "Well, shove over another stack, Robert."

Ballarat Bob glances casual over at the markers, which represent sixty-eight hundred dollars. "Hold on here a minute, colonel," he says. "These here markers is gettin' more or less numerous. How much money have you got in the bank?"

Of course this is the signal for the colonel to remember he's a Southern gentleman. "That, suh," he says, "is none o' your damned business, suh. I'm a Southern gentleman, suh, an' amply able to meet any obligations that I may contract, suh."

"Wa-ll, you'll have to show me, brother," says Ballarat Bob. "An' moreover, whenever a customer gets ugly with me, right then an' there he's got to hunt a new gamblin' house. First thing you know, you'll be accusin' me o' runnin' a sandy on you—an' then there'd be trouble—deep, dark-red trouble with sky-blue trimmin's; so let's avoid that, colonel, by closin' this session. Prompt settlements makes long friends. Gimme your check for sixty-eight hundred dollars, go your way an' sin no more."

The colonel writes his check with a flourish. Ballarat blots it, chucks it careless-like into his cash drawer, an' then leans back for a long, severe look at Colonel Elmer Poundstone. It makes the colonel nervous, so, he asks what there is about him to make Ballarat stare so.

"Why it's that wide yaller streak in you, colonel," says Ballarat pleasantly, an' then he stands up, slams his chair back agin the wall an' slaps the colonel's face so hard the sound of the clout could be heard from here to our camp up on the mesa.

"You wuthless, ornery skunk," he says, "I had a curiosity to see just how far you'd go. Ever since you struck this camp you been pikin' around, buckin' faro games like the shorthorn, dead-beat shyster you are. 'I'll have to give you a check,' you say when you lose, an' it's 'Mr. Gambler, give me the money,' when you win. Your check! You know in your rotten heart you'll telegraph the Cinnabar National Bank first thing in the mornin' to stop payment on it. Now, listen to me, *hombre*. I don't want you around here any more, because I ain't got no more use for you than I have for your two wuthless checks." An' Ballarat pulls open his cash drawer, takes out the two checks, tears 'em into pieces an' throws the fragments into the colonel's burnin' face. "Git!" he roars, "an' if you ever show up in my gamblin' house again, I'll kill you most awful dead."

"Good evenin', gentlemen," says the colonel, bowin' low to me an' Doc Bleeker. "At another time an' another place I will argue this matter with our friend Ballarat Bob, an' in the meantime, gentlemen, if you are not averse to takin' the advice of a fool, you will avoid the trained faro decks of Mr. Ballarat Bob an' his cunning case-keeper."

"Folks regard our checks as good collateral, colonel," says the case-keeper.

"We will meet again," says the colonel.

"Coffee an' pistols for two?" asks Ballarat Bob.

"No. Make it three, colonel, old sport," says the case-keeper, but the colonel walks out without replyin',

while Ballarat Bob opens his cash drawer an' hauls out Colonel Elmer Poundstone's checks for sixty-eight hundred an' two hundred dollars respectively.

"Them checks I tore up," says Ballarat, "was just a pair o' blanks I tore out o' my own check-book! Me an' the colonel does business at the same bank in Cinnabar. Naturally, the polecat'll think I've tore up *his* checks, in consequence o' which he won't take the trouble to telegraph his bank to stop payment—an oversight that I'll take advantage of to go to the bank in person an' cash the checks."

"Ballarat," says Doc Bleeker, "you're a genius—an' out an' out twenty-four-carat genius set in platinum, an' I love you like a brother. Let us adjourn to the bar an' in a quart o' the choicest vintage of France celebrate this most amazin' triumph o' virtue over sinfulness an' deceit."

Well, son, we celebrate the victory, an' then Ballarat hires an automobile an' invites me an' the Doc to accompany him over to Cinnabar. We get there in time for a good breakfast, an' promptly at ten o'clock we're in front o' the payin' teller's window of the First National, a-demandin' the wherewithal.

"Seven thousand dollars, eh?" says the teller. "The colonel must have been rollin' 'em high an' had a change o' heart." An' he goes back an' looks up the colonel's account. "Sorry, Ballarat," he says, "but there ain't sufficient funds to meet these checks."

"Can't you cash one of 'em?" pleads Ballarat.

"The little one," says the teller.

Son, we all turn green. As the Doc remarks, it's a case o' love's labor lost, until the payin' teller, which he's a human bein' an' onto the colonel from soup to nuts, saves the day.

"As a employee o' the bank," he says, "I ain't sup-

posed to divulge bank secrets, but I'll say this—in confidence: the colonel's account is shy fifteen hundred dollars."

Ballarat Bob looks at him a second or two, an' then he gets the big idea. So he writes his own check for fifteen hundred, dee-posit it to the credit of Colonel Elmer Poundstone an' shows the duplicate dee-posit tag to the payin' teller. "Now that I've sweetened the colonel's kitty," he announces, "mebbe you'll cash his checks!"

Three hours later we're on our way back to Piñon, when we spot an automobile comin' to beat four of a kind. There's a lone passenger in back, an' as we each slack up to pass on the narrow trail, we see this passenger is Colonel Elmer Poundstone. I have the driver covered quicker'n greased lightnin', and' order him to pull up, which he does *pronto*.

"We ain't after you, son," I says to the chuffer. "Just git out an' rest while we-all interview the colonel." An' I draw down on the colonel an' order him out.

"What is the meanin' of this high-handed proceedin'?" says the colonel in his best manner—but he stays in the car.

"Why," says Ballarat Bob, "I reckon it means that you unloaded that other fifty thousand shares of Cinnabar Consolidated you stole from Mrs. Hardy, an' now you're dustin' along to Cinnabar to cash the check. I'd be obliged, colonel, if you was to hand me that check. You needn't bother to endorse it, becuz I'm goin' to hand it back to the broker that bought your stock. I reckon you didn't wait for the mornin' session o' the Piñon Stock Exchange, but cut the price a little an' sold direct to the broker. Of course, when I explain to him that he's received stolen goods, he'll trade 'em back to me for his check."

"This is an infamous lie," says the colonel, but he don't get no further. Ballarat reaches into the automobile, snakes him out, works' him over somethin' scandalous an' then goes through his clothes. Sure enough, he finds the broker's check, which he confiscates. Then he gives the colonel a hundred dollars for a road stake, chucks him back in the car an' tells the chuffer to deliver him at Cinnabar, while we jog on to Piñon, where we interview the stock-broker. Of course he don't doubt the word of three such citizens as Ballarat Bob, Doc Bleeker an' Chuckwalla Bill Redfield, so he surrenders the stock to us without protest when we hand him back his check.

After that we three get together to cast up the colonel's account. He's cost us five thousand dollars to get back that first block of Cinnabar Consolidated, but at that, even after deductin' the expenses of our trip to Cinnabar, arnica for Ballarat's skinned knuckles, an' the hundred-dollar road-stake to the colonel, we're a hundred an' eight dollars richer'n when we start.

"Whatever'll we do with this hundred an' eight dollars?" says Doc Bleeker.

"Wa-ll," says Ballarat, "seein' as I bought up two wuthless fifty-dollar checks signed by the colonel, payin' therefore fifty cents on the dollar, I reckon I'll just return them two checks to the colonel's bank, to be held till called for. That leaves us just eight dollars to the good, an' I suggest we blow that for a quart o' champagne an' drink bon-voyage to the colonel! And in the meantime, Chuckwalla, you might telegraph Mrs. Hardy at your own expense, just what's happened. It'd be just like that cuss to call on her when his face gets well, propose marriage an' charge her a stiff fee to get shet of him later on. An' you know, Chuckwalla, since you an' me ain't done nothin' but labor to guarantee

that kid's schoolin' since the Hardy family struck the camp, we can't afford to miss a trick now."

Chuckwalla Bill chuckled and stared out into Main Street. His tale was told—almost.

"What became of Ballarat Bob?" I queried.

"When Cinnabar Con. went to twenty cents a share, I concluded one hundred percent profit was good enough for me—so I unloaded on Ballarat. He hung on, an' Cinnabar Con. flew to sixteen dollars when my young engineer friend busted into the high grade. I suppose it's just as well things turn out that-a-way, because I never did know what to do with a million dollars when I had it, an' any time I'm hard up now, my credit is always good with Ballarat—so I'm just as happy as if I was rich. Ballarat quits gamblin' an' buys a cattle ranch."

"And Mrs. Hardy and the youngster?"

"Wa-ll," Chuckwalla Bill chuckled, "the last time I was passin' through Humboldt County, I stopped over at Ballarat's ranch, an' Mrs. Ballarat Bob 'lows to me in confidence as how her husband's the handsomest man in the whole State o' Nevada. An' the kid's callin' him 'Popper'!"

The Handshake Agreement

LONG SHORTY FERGUSON and Dan Purdy were, in the desert vernacular, "pardners from sody to hock."

In the matter of age, race, complexion, religion, morals, nature, and condition of servitude, Messrs. Ferguson and Purdy ran the race of life to what the sporting fraternity would designate a dead heat.

Both were about fifty years; both were members of the Caucasian race; both were pagans and wholly unconvertible. They paid their bills and gave alms indiscriminately, generously, and in quantity totally disproportionate to their worldly wealth; they borrowed without hesitation or embarrassment, but had never begged. Long Shorty is authority for the statement that, though they had followed many a wildcat to its lair, he could remember but one occasion when they had starved to death!

To continue: They were gentle, kindly, humorous, until one ran foul of their unwritten laws, when he discovered two elderly gentlemen singularly incapable of dodging any issue, be that issue what it might. They were dyed-in-the-wool disciples of the doctrine of personal responsibility, which trait was perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of each. At any rate, it is the one the reader is cautioned to bear in mind, for without it there would be no story, and our heroes would degenerate into two ordinary old desert rats, in whose comings and goings nobody would have the slightest interest.

So much for the inward aspect. Outwardly Long Shorty and Dan were sizable men, with wrinkled, leathery necks and squint eyes; and by reason of a lifetime of journeying to far horizons they were burned a bricky brown. In a word, or two or three, they were prospectors, gypsies of the Land of Heat and Silence, distinguished from their branch of the genus *Homo* by nothing more striking than their inflexible doctrine of personal responsibility and the possession by Mr. Ferguson of a plural nickname of singular nature. Yet even this latter is readily accounted for.

Once in a certain boom camp, the name of which nobody now remembers, there dwelt three men surnamed Ferguson. One was long and spindly—that was Long Ferguson. Another was short and fat—that was Shorty Ferguson. One was designed by his Creator along conservative lines—and that was Long Shorty Ferguson. Since he had acquired this cognomen prior to his association with Dan Purdy, Mr. Purdy never called him anything else, except when drunk or profoundly excited. On such occasions he always addressed his partner by the latter's full Christian name, which was Charles Wilfred.

Somewhere back in the springtime of life Messrs. Ferguson and Purdy had foregathered, loaded their worldly effects on a common packsaddle on an extremely common burro yclept Gentle Annie, and gone prospecting. Later they acquired more burros; but, like all self-made men, they had a humble start. And—speaking of starts, let us commence our story.

Let us assume twenty years to have passed—twenty years of joyous, profitless, aimless, unrestricted wandering, during which the desert, which plays no favorites, wrought its mystic spell on Long Shorty Ferguson and Dan Purdy. If you do not know the type it is hard

for us to describe exactly how, when, or where the desert finally got Long Shorty and Dan. Suffice the fact, therefore, that get them it did; that the silence settled over them like a benediction; that the alchemy of time wrought its changes in character as in appearance, making of them a curious combination of candor and reticence, wisdom and childlike simplicity, sinner and saint. They made some money from time to time and spent it in riotous living and the purchase of the bare necessities of life. They had never known luxury. Blessed mortals! They never missed it! And they had never really grown up. They had lived so long close to the great breast of Nature that their old hearts were clean and unsullied.

Yes, they sinned on those infrequent occasions when they returned to civilization; but what of that? There was nothing else to do, and civilization and sin are synonymous—at least, they were in the camps our heroes visited; and Dan and Long Shorty were the last two men in the world to throw cold water on a popular pastime. They had a vague notion that when they came to town a bout with the devil was eminently fitting and proper and no more than was expected of them. They never stayed very long, however. The noise and the chatter and the gilt and the glamor of camp life frayed their nerves more quickly than desert whisky. The waste was always calling.

They had tried hotels, but preferred a bed in the sand beside a little fire of mesquite wood. To be awakened by a seven-o'clock whistle or the ringing of a room telephone affrighted and annoyed them; they wanted the caress of the cold dawn wind rustling the sage; the shrill yip-yip-yip of a coyote on a distant butte voicing his age-old plaint of famine. And mostly they wanted peace. However—

Dan and Long Shorty had had a week's carouse in Kelcey's Wells. Red-eyed and repentant they sat in the Little Casino; and through the garish confines of that hall of Not-a-Chance they glimpsed, in their mind's eye, enchanting vistas of saw-toothed mountains of indigo hue, naked white buttes, and vast undulating stretches of burnt-umber desert; through the swinging doors, as the young engineer of the Boston Syndicate that owned the Johnny Mine entered, the wind carried a handful of sand and a tang of sage which, mingling with cigar smoke, stale air, and the sickening odor of lemon peel, whisky, and humanity, woke in the breasts of Dan and Long Shorty a poignant nostalgia.

Long Shorty glanced at Dan Purdy. He spoke no word, and yet he shrieked aloud:

"Dan'l, let's drift! Let's go away and be clean. Let's pack now and camp tonight at Silver Peak; and after supper we'll sit by the fire and spit tobacco juice into it, and watch the moon rise over the Panamints, and be still!"

Dan nodded a brief affirmation, rose, hitched his belt, and started for the door. Long Shorty followed.

In twenty years that is what the desert had done to Dan and Long Shorty. It had brought peace and perfect understanding; it had substituted telepathy for speech; it had taught them that silence is golden.

The engineer of the Boston Syndicate blocked Dan and Long Shorty in their dash for freedom by grasping an arm of each.

"Where to?" he queried.

Dan waved his free arm dramatically.

"To hell out o' here!" growled Long Shorty, his disgust betraying him into speech.

"I'll furnish an outfit, grub and ammunition, and

give five dollars a day to each of you if you'll go down to the Johnny Mine, do the assessment work and guard the property until the first day of April. Some Mormons from over near the Utah line claim an adverse title. There might be some claim-jumping."

Dan and Long Shorty shook their heads briefly. Not with them on the job! Hardly!

"You'll take the contract, then?" the engineer of the Boston Syndicate queried.

Dan and Long Shorty nodded and each extended his horny right hand. The Boston engineer shook each in turn; the bargain was concluded.

Now some may prefer, in a matter involving an outlay of cash and possibly blood, to have their attorneys draw up a memorandum of agreement, sign and seal the same before a notary public, and afterward file it for record with the county clerk. Not so the Dan Purdys and Long Shorty Fergusons of this world. They may look extremely wild and woolly, but they are wise enough to avoid entangling legal alliances, for they are well aware of the jokers in written agreements, the idiotic decisions of supreme courts, and the venality of men who wear white collars and have their trousers pressed. Consequently it was their custom to avoid expense and misunderstanding by shaking hands with the party of the second part; for in their primitive code woe unto him who repudiated a handshake agreement.

That was the unpardonable crime. Of a murderer Dan and Long Shorty might have said: "Wa-al, I dunno. Mebbe he just had to beef the feller." Of a thief they might have said: "Wa-al, mebbe the feller was hungry an' down on his luck." But of the foul wretch who broke a handshake agreement they would have said: "The damned skunk! Served him right! I'd 'a' killed the varmint myself. Why, he shook hands

with the man, an' then went an' deliberately did the opposite!"

The psychology of this philosophy lies in the principle that a murderer or a thief is merely a murderer or a thief; that such an individual has no honor is a matter of public knowledge. But when you shake hands with a man to clinch an understanding or agreement, the only reason you do so is because you believe him to be a man of honor; and by his acceptance of your hand he confirms this belief. Hence, if later he repudiates the handshake, all men know that he once did have honor but forfeited it for some material gain; and for such a man there is no closed season thereafter.

It required approximately thirty seconds to consummate the deal with all its whereases and wherefores. Their employer furnished a team of sturdy little white mules and a wide-tired light wagon, into which the partners piled their equipment and the season's grub, two rifles and a quantity of cartridges. The four burros constituting a problem they were obliged to leave behind, the engineer for the Boston Syndicate gave them ten dollars each for three of them.

The fourth, Gentle Annie, now a sedate burro of twenty-eight years and too worthless to bring a price, was turned loose to wander wheresoever she listed. She listed to tag after Dan and Long Shorty, which was another trick on the part of the devil; but our heroes, who were reasonably fond of Gentle Annie, construed her voluntary pilgrimage as evidence of a deathless affection. Consequently when she came sneaking into camp that night and nickered for her evening flapjack they made her welcome, and the following morning packed two kegs of water on her, tied her to the tail gate of their wagon and headed down through

Palmetto Cañon into Inyo County, California; thence down the lonely arid stretches of Mesquite Valley, as the northern arm of Death Valley is sometimes called, winning safely at last to Deep Wells.

At Deep Wells the off mule sickened and died; wherefore Long Shorty and Dan remembered he had broken his hobbles one night in Mesquite Valley and had doubtless drunk deep of an arsenic spring. They thought it was tough luck, but forbore to blame the devil, notwithstanding the fact that they were in his country. Instead, they blessed Gentle Annie's thoughtfulness in tagging after them. They harnessed her with the surviving mule and continued blithely on their way down the west flank of the Funeral Range until they came to Furnace Creek.

The waters of Furnace Creek are meager, warm, and burdened with sufficient borax to make them soft and cleansing. Here Dan and Long Shorty rested and bathed for one week, while Gentle Annie and the white mule gorged themselves with alfalfa grown on the oasis known as Furnace Creek Ranch. Then they took the trail again, southeast through Furnace Creek Cañon, up and over the Funeral Range, down into the Valley of the Amargosa. In this weird valley one would expect to find a weird river, and he is not disappointed. The devil controls the Amargosa. He causes it to flow underground. Only at infrequent intervals does the bed of the river rise above its surface.

Across the Amargosa went Dan Purdy and Long Shorty Ferguson and Gentle Annie and the white mule, up into the Charleston Buttes, on the evening of the second day out from Furnace Creek Ranch. In the level rays of the sun, hanging on the serrated sky-line behind them, the buttes flared white where there was borax, red where the oxides cropped out, and black

with iron pyrites. And there were ochers and browns and deep, velvety blues where the night shadows already hung in the cañons; and all about Long Shorty and Dan was the eternal peace that soothed and comforted them like the strains of distant music.

"Seems awful good after that toot in Kelcey's Wells—eh?" quoth Dan Purdy as he marked a distant yellow scar on a hillside for the Johnny Mine.

Long Shorty nodded.

"Looks like a good place to winter," he said finally, as though loath to break the silence. "We got a water hole right on the claim."

Dan made suitable comment on this evidence of the tenderness of his Creator, and they pressed onward through the buttes, arriving at the mine shortly after dark.

The succeeding six weeks dragged slowly by; and in that time Dan and Long Shorty did the required assessment work on the lode, lead or deposit of the Johnny Mine. This matter attended to, they had nothing to do save guard the property, whereupon they took to playing rummy and staking nothing thereon, for the reason that they had no assets more tangible than the clothes on their backs, their firearms, jackknives, and chewing tobacco; and inasmuch as these were all community property they could not be staked in a game of chance. Also, as everybody knows, a game of chance without something of definite intrinsic value staked on the outcome, is the most puerile pleasure in which two old rascallions like Dan and Long Shorty could possibly engage.

However, necessity is the mother of invention, and it is a cold day, even in the Valley of the Amargosa, when Satan cannot find some mischief for idle hands to do. What more natural, then, than that, with such

fecund aid, Dan Purdy should presently father an answer to the problem?

"Long Shorty," said he, "tell you what we'll do to make this gamblin' interestin'. Now, me an' you're young yet, with the world before us; and in the nature o' things we just nacherly can't be kept down. We're bound to strike it rich some day."

"That's logic," Long Shorty assented interestedly.

"Then," said Mr. Purdy, "let's bet on futures!"

Why not, indeed? Such means of gleaning pleasure and profit have been practiced in stock exchanges the world over. Moreover, discounting the future was an old game with Dan and Long Shorty; so the proposition seemed reasonable.

"Spread your hand, Dan'l," Long Shorty invited his partner; and forthwith Mr. Purdy complied.

His scheme was absurdly simple. For purposes of expediency they were to assume their luck at mining to be running strong, all signs to the contrary notwithstanding; and that some time within the succeeding four years they would make the Big Strike for which they had been searching half their lives. This strike, according to Dan Purdy, would be worth not less than one million dollars; and Long Shorty gravely hazarded an opinion that it would be worth even more.

Very well! Within four years, then, they would each be worth, at the very least, half a million dollars. Therefore, since credit and time extensions constitute the real basis of capital, Daniel pointed out that he and Long Shorty were, to all intents and purposes, equipped with sufficient capital to render their gambling operations of more interest than a game of casino between two old maids. On Long Shorty's hearty indorsement of these sentiments he suggested that the game continue at one dollar a point, each to keep an ac-

curate record of the play until such time as they should cease playing; thereupon the loser should issue to the winner his promissory note in payment of his losses.

In the event of discovery of the Big Strike within four years from the date of that note, the same was to be paid by the signer in stock of the company. On the other hand, if the Big Strike did not develop within the statutory period, then the holder of the note could whistle for payment; for there was to be no renewal of the obligation, and inasmuch as gambling debts are not collectible in law, their own sense of honor must decide the contest finally.

Long Shorty was delighted. He declared that this plan was the inspiration of genius; and forthwith the two friends shook hands on it.

It is not the purpose of the author to annoy the reader with a recital of the details of this long gambling bee. Suffice it that in the beginning our heroes possessed but one deck of cards, of most inferior quality; and when, at length, the cards in Dan Purdy's hand were as readily recognizable to Long Shorty as the white mule or Gentle Annie, the winter was not half over, and of his original stake Long Shorty had left but three hundred and eighty-two thousand four hundred and fifty-nine dollars.

It developed that Dan Purdy had begun to recognize the backs of Long Shorty's cards at least ten days earlier than Long Shorty had begun to recognize his; whereupon Dan had craftily suggested a raise in the stakes to five dollars a point. Later, when Long Shorty, confident of the correctness of his diagnosis of Dan Purdy's hands, declared for ten dollars a point, the spots had been shuffled off the cards, and they were forced to discontinue playing through sheer lack of the necessary equipment.

It was a terrible situation. Mr. Purdy, flushed with victory, twitted Mr. Ferguson on the disastrous outcome and suggested that a game of Button—Button—Who's Got the Button? would doubtless be more in line with the latter's qualifications for indulging in a game of chance.

"Game o' chance," roared Long Shorty, "why, I'd as lief play poker with strippers or buck a faro layout with a sanded deck."

"That ain't neither here nor there, Long Shorty," Dan reminded him. "The fact remains that I've won a hundred an' seventeen thousand five forty-one from you; an' as there ain't a possible means o' continuin' this game on a fair basis, accordin' to the belch you just lets out, you might as well make out that there promissory note. However, just so we won't have to deal in odd numbers, I'll spit at a crack with you for two thousand four hundred an' fifty-nine dollars to make the note a hundred an' twenty thousand even."

Long Shorty silently extended his hand. Dan Purdy shook it; each rolled his cud and extracted a mouthful of tobacco juice. Dan Purdy drew a line in the dust with a stick, designated a sun crack in the collar set of the piñon windlass over the shaft, stepped back to the line, fired at ten feet—which with Mr. Purdy was point-blank range—and called on Long Shorty to bear witness that the charge had disappeared in its entirety. Examination revealed the fact that it had gone through the sun crack to the heart of the collar set.

"That's good, clean spittin'!" remarked Long Shorty, who was as fair a sport as ever spat at a crack. "But I guess I can tie the score." And he did.

Whereupon Dan challenged him to the best two heats out of three. At the third trial Long Shorty fired with his salivary glands at half cock, as it were; and Dan,

the possessor of a slight orifice between his front teeth, which enabled him to operate powerfully and scientifically, won, as the saying is, under double wraps.

They returned to their tent and smoked. To them came presently Gentle Annie and the white mule, and it was plain that these two had had a disagreement. The white mule was pursuing the burro, biting her viciously and endeavoring to get into position to flank her and deliver a broadside. On her part, Gentle Annie, realizing that she was no match for the white mule, had fled for protection to Dan and Long Shorty.

"Whatever is the matter with that mu-el?" observed Long Shorty, starting up and reaching for a pick handle. "The critter acts like he's locoed."

"Whoa, there, you white devil! Lay off on Gentle Annie!" And he rushed out and threatened the mule with the pick handle, while Gentle Annie scurried back of him for protection.

The white mule, thus rebuked, turned his attention to Long Shorty. With a vicious bray he rushed the old prospector; and Long Shorty, noting the blazing eye and long, bared teeth, hurled the pick handle at the crazed animal and dodged nimbly to one side. The missile struck the white mule across the nose and diverted him for an instant, though it did not discourage him. He whirled after Long Shorty, reared on his hind legs, struck out with his front feet, and—

"Bet you twenty thousand he kills you!" yelled Dan Purdy jocosely; though for all that he sprang to his rifle, for it was apparent to him that the white mule was carnivorous.

"You're on!" Long Shorty shouted back; and on the instant he pulled his six-shooter and shot the mule through the head. It was an excellent shot, and the animal was dead before his body struck the ground.

"You win!" said Dan Purdy complacently, setting back his rifle.

"I don't aim to be chewed up by no locoed mu-el, Dan'l. Wonder what got into the critter. He shore didn't act rational for a mu-el."

Dan Purdy elected to ignore this query. He was not interested in the psychology of white mules and would not presume to say to what reasons might be attributed this sudden fury, for just at present he was thinking of something of far more importance. He walked out from the tent, sprayed the defunct mule liberally with tobacco juice, and remarked:

"Charles Wilfred, you oughtn't to have beefed that mule!"

"Uh-huh! I know, Dan. I ought to have let him chaw me an' tromp me in the cactus so you could win another bet—eh? I guess not! By slayin' this here madcap mu-el I've reduced the principal on that there promissory note twenty thousand dollars; an' if you think I'm settin' any such value as that on any mu-el—an' a maniac white mu-el in particular—"

"Ain't no use repinin' and voicin' vain regrets," sighed Dan Purdy, "only there's sich a thing as bein' too quick on the trigger. You might 'a' had sense enough to entice this here mule out o' our front yard before killin' him. Now we got to bury the critter."

So they buried the white mule, and had scarcely finished before Long Shorty found time to remember that his gambling account with Daniel was one hundred thousand dollars on the wrong side of the ledger. Wherefore he longed for vengeance on Mr. Purdy, and cast about in his mind for a gambling device in which the element of skill should be eliminated and sheer chance alone decide the issue of the combat. On his part, Dan Purdy, flushed with success and with

anxious eyes on the remainder of the Ferguson fortune, did likewise. What more natural than that success should crown their dual efforts?

Mr. Purdy wandered abroad, found two desert terrapins of equal size and returned with them to camp. Then he and Mr. Ferguson stretched two thirty-foot horsehair riatas side by side and two feet apart on a gentle slope, sent both turtles away to an even start, and waited five hours and twenty-seven minutes by Long Shorty's watch to get the returns of the race.

The terrapins would not cross the hairy confines of the course because the horsehair tickled them under their respective chins.

Eventually, however, Long Shorty's reptile found his way down the slope and free of the horsehair lane, thus winning the first prize of fifty thousand dollars. Mr. Purdy was so incensed at his terrapin that he blew it to smithereens with six well-directed shots of his revolver; and Long Shorty hooted with delight.

For two days the gambling fever boiled and bubbled in their blood, seeking an outlet, though both were resolved to race no more desert terrapins. Eventually however, Long Shorty solved the problem of procuring quick action by taking a smooth, bright board from the top of a case of tomatoes. In the center of this board he set an empty baking-powder can and, with a pencil, drew a circle round the base of the can. Next he stripped from the back of Gentle Annie two wood-ticks of approximately the same age, agility, and displacement, but differing slightly in color, placed them in the geometric center of this circle and covered them with the inverted baking-powder can; after which he bet Dan Purdy five thousand dollars that at the end of five minutes the dark blue tick would be found, when the can was lifted, closer to the circle than the pearl-gray tick.

Daniel promptly accepted and lost exactly one thousand dollars a minute for the succeeding five minutes. Luck was against him; and, notwithstanding the fact that he shifted the burden of his hopes to the dark blue tick when Long Shorty gave odds of two to one on the pearl-gray, and the further fact that he demanded and secured a change of ticks, the sun set with Daniel Purdy sixty-seven thousand dollars loser.

Two days later, when the leisurely perambulations of Gentle Annie's ticks threatened to set their respective reasons tottering on their respective thrones, Dan Purdy again sought the faithful beast for a new contribution, and discovered that Gentle Annie's days were numbered. A wound on her aged neck where the locoed white mule had bitten her had become infected; and poor Gentle Annie, faithful companion for twenty years, had lockjaw. Long Shorty reverently led her from camp as far as her stiffening muscles would carry her, and slew her with his forty-five-caliber revolver.

The source of ticks—at least ticks of racing size—being now eliminated, gambling languished for a day or two. Then Dan Purdy had a new idea. A lone coyote appeared in the vicinity, attracted no doubt by Gentle Annie; and Dan bet Long Shorty ten thousand dollars he could lift that coyote with his rifle while the creature was on the run. The distance being at least five hundred yards, Long Shorty accepted; whereupon Daniel started the coyote with a trial shot and killed it with the next. Nothing daunted, Long Shorty immediately offered odds of five to one that it was a she coyote. Dan promptly wagered the ten thousand just won at the prevailing odds that it was a he—and walked back from the carcass as rich as when he had first observed the animal.

On the morning following the adventure of the

coyote Dan Purdy rolled out of his blankets and sought the water hole for his matutinal ablutions. While standing here combing his hair with his fingers, he happened to glance high up the face of a steep hill back of their camp and beheld a mountain sheep.

Now in California it is a felony to kill a mountain sheep, and Dan and Long Shorty were well aware of this; but, since the prospects of meeting a game warden in that silent land were, to say the least, not bright, and since they had not tasted fresh meat in two months, Dan Purdy went into the tent for his rifle and to break the news of the sheep's presence to Long Shorty, who came out *en déshabillé* and took a look.

"He's on the west slope of the hill," commented Long Shorty, "an' if we leave this here water hole for a couple o' hours he'll work down lower to get a drink. You slip round to the north slope, Dan: I'll take the south slope, and we'll work uphill, gradually convergin' toward the west. If we work it that way we ought to get him."

"We!" sneered Mr. Purdy. "I! Bet you twenty thousand dollars I get that sheep!"

"You're on," declared Long Shorty.

Five minutes later he was dressed and sneaking round to the southern base of the hill, preparatory to ascending and flanking the unsuspecting sheep.

It was a fair-sized hill—of about nine hundred or a thousand feet elevation, with a forty-five-degree slope, covered with talus and a sparse growth of sage. Long Shorty climbed swiftly until he reached the crest of the hill and discovered a plateau of several acres plentifully strewn with smooth white granite boulders which, in his excitement, he at first mistook for a drove of sheep. He worked across this plateau to the western brow of the hill and peered cautiously over. Far below

him Dan Purdy's rifle cracked half a dozen times in smart succession, and presently the harassed sheep came bounding up the slope unhurt. As the animal reached the plateau Long Shorty bowled him over at fifty feet, bled him, dressed him, draped the carcass over a rock, and sat down to draw his breath.

Here he awaited the arrival of Dan Purdy and had a fresh chew; and while working it up to the proper consistency he gazed out contentedly across the Valley of the Amargosa. The Funeral Range rose just across the way, while beyond the Funerals, Telescope Peak thrust its thin blue spire out of the Panamints on the other side of Death Valley. It was a pleasant prospect, viewed from that cool height; and now that the shimmering curtain of summer haze had given way to the clear, steel-blue winter atmosphere, Long Shorty thought it was as fair a country as human eye had ever gazed on. He was still lost in admiration of his chosen land when Daniel, badly winded, gained the plateau.

Long Shorty said nothing. He merely grinned and switched his gnarly trigger finger six times to indicate the six shots Mr. Purdy had fired in vain at the sheep. The latter pretended not to notice this; after an indifferent glance at Long Shorty and the dead sheep his gaze wandered out across the boulder-strewn mesa, for Mr. Purdy was a prospector. He observed that the mesa at its eastern end converged to a cañon, which in turn sloped gently upward to the snow-clad peaks above.

Dan Purdy observed that this cañon was the natural escape for erosion from the upper heights. For untold centuries cloudbursts rushing down this cañon had been exposing granite boulders, which would lie in the cañon until an avalanche of snow, following the same course, swept them out onto the mesa. As a consequence of his

scrutiny, Dan Purdy's first thought was: "If there are any gold deposits farther up in that range, where nobody has ever been, there'll be plenty of float down on this mesa to indicate it. I'll take some of this eroded soil down to the water hole and sample it."

He turned to Long Shorty to suggest the advisability of a little prospecting before they descended the hill, when he observed in his partner's eye the sudden maniac gleam which proclaimed all too truly that Long Shorty had hit on a new gambling device. He got up, glared wildly round, nodded, and turned to Dan Purdy; and Mr. Purdy, having lived with Long Shorty twenty years, knew instantly that Long Shorty thought not of such futile and inconsequential atoms as gold dust and nuggets, but of rocks—great, smooth, round, white granite boulders, that strewed the mesa by hundreds. Being a human being himself Dan Purdy realized that within Long Shorty's being there surged a sudden, fierce, juvenile longing to roll one of those rocks down the hill and time it, to see just how long it would take to reach the desert, far below.

"Dan'l," said Long Shorty, "you owe me eighty-seven thousand dollars. I'll roll you the rocks for one hundred and seventy-four thousand dollars or nothin'."

"Damn my wicked soul!" murmured Mr. Purdy in a kind of holy ecstasy. "I'll go you!"

He drove his horny digits deep into the soil round the base of a hundred-pound boulder. Long Shorty stooped to assist him; and with many a grunt and labored gasp the boulder was presently uprooted from its bed and rolled across the mesa to the northern slope of the hill, where they held it poised.

"Which side do you choose—clean or dirty?" demanded Long Shorty.

Dan named his preference, Long Shorty divested

himself of a joyous and abandoned whoop, tipped the boulder with his foot and rolled it over the grade.

Long Shorty's shout as the boulder got under way was the typical shout of the man of wide, unkenneled horizons. It was pronounced Ya-hoo! with plenty of yip and bark to it, testifying to his pleasure as the stone commenced its mad flight; for of all simple outdoor sports it is doubtful whether there is one quite so fascinating as rolling a huge boulder down a long, steep hill. How frantically it leaps into the air, with ever-lengthening leaps, as with the speed of a comet it approaches the base of the hill and shoots far out into the flat below! There is nothing, we trow, that can quite equal it, unless it be the delight of dropping a stone down an eighty-foot well and waiting for the heavy plunk from the invisible deep.

Dan and Long Shorty craned their necks as the boulder swept down the hill, scattering the talus in its path, and marked where it came to a final resting-place three hundred yards out in the desert; then they turned and went back to the carcass of the sheep, prepared the animal for transportation and returned to camp. They strolled over in the open and examined the boulder. It lay soiled side up, and Dan Purdy was Long Shorty's debtor to the tune of one hundred and seventy-four thousand dollars.

"That," said Long Shorty, "leaves you with a bank roll o' three hundred an' twenty-six thousand dollars, and my luck's runnin' so strong I got a hunch I can break you with one more rock. Dan'l, I'll roll you the biggest boulder we can handle tomorrow for the balance o' your fortune."

Daniel readily assented, and bright and early the following morning they again toiled to the boulder-strewn mesa. They carried a light crowbar with them, for they

planned to roll a stone weighing several hundred pounds, as the heavier the stone the more speed it would attain, and consequently the greater the delight of watching its flight.

For two hours they worked like beavers, and finally the stone was poised on the brow of the hill, ready for the start. Long Shorty spoke:

"This ends our gamblin', Dan'l. We'll make or break on this boulder and quit. This is too much like hard work and the pleasure's over too quick."

Dan agreed with him and extended his hand.

"May the best man win!" he declared melodramatically. "And remember, we're playin' for keeps."

Long Shorty accepted his partner's proffered hand and chose the weather-beaten side of the boulder to carry his money.

"As a friend an' pardner," he supplemented Dan's statement, "you're entitled to the last swig o' water in my canteen; but when it comes to gamblin' I'd take the shirt off'n your back, Dan'l. I'm shore gamblin' for keeps. Let'er go!"

They shoved the boulder off—and at that precise instant the devil decided to take a hand in the game himself. In the valley far below them an automobile came rapidly into view round the toe of the hill and directly in the course of the granite Juggernaut bearing down on it with the speed of a comet. Even as Dan and Long Shorty, pop-eyed with horror and speechless with fright, saw the impending tragedy, the automobile stopped and a man jumped down and stooped over to lift the hood.

With a superhuman effort Long Shorty emitted his Ya-hoo! with more yip and bark than had ever characterized it previously, and the warning reached the man at the car about five seconds before the boulder.

He looked up. The boulder was headed straight for the hood of the car, behind which he stood, and a broad standing jump of six feet would save him.

He jumped, with a second to spare; but, as we have previously remarked, the devil was behind that boulder, with a power greater than Newton's law of gravitation. Ten feet from the car a stone projecting from the floor of the desert diverted the boulder, causing it to miss the car by three feet and overtake the driver. As Dan Purdy remarked, the only comforting thing about the incident lay in the fact that the man never knew he had lost!

Dan Purdy and Long Shorty Ferguson called in agony and unison on their Maker and started at top speed down the slope. When at length they reached the ultimate result of their deal in futures Mr. Purdy turned away and was very sick, while Mr. Ferguson, consumed with horror, despair, and travail of conscience, commenced to weep!

"Coons an' catamounts!" he moaned in a weak, small voice. "Dan'l, this is plumb awful!"

From the tonneau of the car came a shrill feminine shriek. At the sound our heroes sprang straight into the air and lit with every hair standing on end, while they stared at the automobile. There was no survivor in sight; however, the voice, proceeding from the floor space in the tonneau, seemed to indicate that the dead man's companion lay cowering there in fear and trembling.

Like a man walking on eggs Dan Purdy cautiously approached the car and peered into the tonneau. The next instant he had backed away, crooked a horny forefinger at his partner and was fleeing from the wrath of a widow—and possibly an orphan. It was the first time on record he had ever dodged an issue, but he salved

his conscience with the reflection that this was not an issue, but a judgment come to Daniel. Though Mr. Purdy was by nature and training as harmless as a pet fox, he was, nevertheless, under stress, possessed of ample courage to kill a man; but when it came to facing his victim's widow he was quite willing to check the bet up to somebody else.

They had almost reached their camp by the water hole before Long Shorty, having completed his own investigation of the tonneau, caught up with his partner. Together they sought sanctuary in the tent, and threw themselves on their blankets, groaned and gritted their teeth, and swore scandalously and with feeling. Five minutes of this and then Long Shorty sat up.

"Dan'l," he said in a sepulchral voice, "we got to do somethin'."

"I wish I was in hell!" cried Dan—a perfectly unnecessary remark, by the way, in view of the fact that he was already up to his eyebrows in that interesting suburb.

Consider for a moment their predicament: For and in consideration of certain cash moneys on account, to them in hand paid by the representative of the Boston Syndicate, and in further consideration of additional emolument at the conclusion of their contract, they had bound themselves by their word of honor, represented in a handshake apiece with the syndicate representative, to proceed to the Johnny Mine, do the assessment work, and guard the property until the first of April, when the syndicate would send down men to work the property.

Until they could be relieved of their trust, therefore, they must stay; and here they were with a widow and an infernal automobile on their hands—of all things in nature and out of it the very two of which they knew

absolutely nothing! All of this on the fifteenth day of January, in the Valley of the Amargosa, with civilization a hundred miles distant across hell and no hope in sight until the first day of April!

"Whoo!" cried the agonized Purdy, realizing all these things and burying his head in his blankets. He lay there shuddering until presently Long Shorty rose and shook him by the shoulder.

"Dan'l," he said solemnly, "pull yourself together an' face the music."

Mr. Purdy, thus adjured, realized his responsibility and pulled himself together.

"Wa-al," he queried in a broken voice, "what've you got to suggest?"

"I suggest," replied Long Shorty, "that there's a highsterical female, the victim o' two o' the worst old fools that ever saw sagebrush, a-kickin' an' a-squawlin' in the box o' that otter-mo-bile; an' it's up to me an' you to face the music. We can't run away from it, Dan'l, even if Gentle Annie was alive an' well to pack our kit an' enough water to get out o' the country. It's up to us to excuse ourselves for widderin' this woman and give the remainders Christian burial. Climb into a clean shirt and overalls, Dan'l, and let's try to look respectable even if we ain't."

Dan shook his head and bit his lips; nevertheless, he accepted Long Shorty's advice and changed his clothes.

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," said Long Shorty philosophically.

"Don't make much difference after a man's damned," answered Mr. Purdy, choking back a sob.

As they dressed, Long Shorty outlined the course of action.

"We'll just be strollin' along, easy an' casual, like we was out prospectin', an' happen on to the scene acci-

dental-like. Mebbe she didn't see us on top o' the hill and we know she didn't see us at the otter-mo-bile! In that case mebbe she won't know we killed her old man an' that'll make her a heap easier to handle."

"I hope so," mourned Dan. "There ain't no use tellin' everything we know."

"You said something that time, pardner. We'll have to get her over to camp, where she can lie down with her sorrier—"

He broke off suddenly, reached into his war bag and brought forth a bottle of the proprietary medicine without which no true desert rat ever travels—a quart of whisky, with a flash test of eighty-five degrees.

"A snort o' this'll put some heart in her," he declared confidently; and together they took their courage in hand and sauntered carelessly along the trail to the scene of the tragedy.

The woman was still crouched in the tonneau, but they could hear her wails though they were a considerable distance off. Long Shorty and Dan realized what she was hiding from and did not blame her.

When they had approached within fifty yards of the stranded automobile Long Shorty, simulating profound excitement, yelled at the top of his voice:

"Oh, Dan! Hurry up! There's something happened here. I hear a lady cryin'."

"What's the matter?" shouted Mr. Purdy dutifully.

"An otter-mo-bile, an' buzzards, an' a lady cryin'!" yelled Long Shorty. "Somethin's shore happened to somebody." And away he raced through the low sage, with the unhappy Purdy following.

"Man dead here," he called a moment later. "Rock rolled down off the mounting an' flattened him out like a postage stamp."

Out of the tail of his eye the diabolical Long Shorty

was aware of a woman's face peering at him over the back of the front seat. Dan Purdy was also subconsciously aware of the same apparition; but since he was following Long Shorty's lead he elected to ignore it until a shrill, quavering cry of "Help!" forced him to turn his attention from the "remainders."

Long Shorty did likewise, and the widow stood up in the tonneau and held out her arms appealingly. The partners hastened to her aid. Dan Purdy unfastened the tonneau door, and with loud lamentations and shiverings of woe the distressed female fluttered into his arms like a light Monday morning wash down a laundry chute.

"Ma-ma'am, whatever's the matter of you?" Daniel finally managed to blurt out.

Continued and hysterical "Oh-oh-oh's!" were his sole reply, however, while the widow, her arms clenched tightly round his neck, to his great embarrassment, sobbed out her woe on Mr. Purdy's bosom—the latter's attitude during this distressing scene resembling somewhat that of a man fighting a ghost or making love to a crocodile. Long Shorty relieved the situation.

"Here, now, ma'am," he said soothingly; "this is shore tough luck, and me an' old Dan certainly feels for you in your sorer an' affliction; but what can't be cured must be endoored. As the Good Book says: 'The Lord gave, an' the Lord hath taken away'; an' your husband's app'inted time had come. Take a jolt o' this hooch, ma'am, an' it'll put some heart in ye." And despite her vigorous protests he forced the bottle to her lips and emptied down her throat a firing charge for a six-cylinder motor. "Thar!" he continued. "Ye feel better right off, don't ye?"

The victim of this desert hospitality gasped, blinked, coughed, and in various other ways demonstrated be-

yond the shadow of a doubt that for the present, at least, her mind was off her recent bereavement. She finally fainted.

"Ye tarnation jackass!" roared Mr. Purdy. "Ye went an' poured that lick down her Sunday throat." Apprehensive, frightened, his voice rose to a shrill scream. "Whatever will I do with her? I do believe she's died on my hands."

"Lay her down flat an' let the blood run to her head," Long Shorty commanded.

He replaced the bottle and, with both feet, quickly scooped a depression in the sand, thereby forming a slight incline to accelerate the flow of blood to the head. Mr. Purdy gladly dropped his burden into the receptacle thus provided and the two stood looking down at her.

"She ain't used to lick," Dan complained. "In givin' lick to females in a emergency like this it ought ter have a little water an' sugar in it."

"I ain't no doctor or trained nuss, nor yet no bar-keeper!" Long Shorty retorted fiercely; "but I'm layin' you three to one it ain't in the book that lick's to be diluted at a time like this. It ain't in natur'!"

"Don't you bet no more with me!" shrilled Dan passionately. "This is what comes o' that fool gamblin' sperrit. It's like to disrupt our pardnership, and it's killed a innercent stranger an' left us with the widder on our hands. As the feller says: 'Be good an' you will be happy.' Whatever," he demanded frantically, "are we a-goin' to do with this widder? She's a frail old fawn, an' if somebody don't come and git her she's shore a-goin' to die on our hands."

"Why so?" demanded Long Shorty. "Die o' what?"

"Starvation, you born dummy! She can't eat our grub an' thrive on it. Pers'nally, Charles Wilfred, I ain't aimin' to start no private cemet'ry association."

Long Shorty scratched his ear.

"Whatever was she a-doin' out here, I'd like to know?" he demanded. He pulled off his battered sombrero and commenced to fan the widow. "An' where'd she come from? Dan'l, I'm beginnin' to lose a whole lot o' them regrets I felt at first about killin' her husband. Serves him right for a-bringin' of a woman into this country."

He continued to fan the widow, while Dan stepped off to one side, like a farmer viewing the blood-sweating behemoth at a circus, and made an interested appraisal of the automobile. He was not familiar with such contraptions, being of the opinion that they resembled considerably a forgotten shot in a shaft and were liable to explode when least expected.

However, what with Long Shorty's fanning and the fire of the Desert Dew coursing through her veins, their patient presently opened her eyes, gave a little shuddering gasp and a long sigh and, after the fashion of her kind, demanded in a thin, far-away voice to know where she was. Long Shorty solemnly assured her that she was with friends.

She sat up, smiled wanly on them and held out a hand to each. They accepted and lifted her to her feet, whereupon she promptly swayed into Long Shorty's arms and hung there. With difficulty he pried her loose, after which he and Dan formed a seat with their horny, clasped hands, and placed her therein; then, with an arm round the neck of each deliverer, the unwelcome guest was borne to the camp by the water hole.

While Long Shorty supported her at the tent entrance, Dan hastened inside to shake out their bedding and dislodge a few horned toads from its folds. Then Long Shorty steered the widow inside, and he and Dan retreated to the automobile, leaving her alone with her grief.

Presently they returned with two wicker suitcases, a hamper basket, and a light camping outfit, which they deposited outside the tent, and once more withdrew to the scene of the disaster. This time they carried a pick and shovel and the canvas with which formerly they had been wont to cover the pack on Gentle Annie. And when the grave was ready they gathered up their victim, removed from his pockets a jackknife, four dollars and ten cents in silver, a folding pocket comb, and a plug of chewing tobacco, wrapped him in the canvas and laid him in the grave.

Then Long Shorty went back to the camp and knocked on the tent pole.

"Ma'am," he said, "the obsequies is now about to commence. Owin' to the damage done to the diseased, me an' my partner finds it imperative to plant him with what might seem to the chief mourner like somethin' in the natur' of indecent haste; but it's our best judgement, ma'am, that it'd better be done. Might you care to be present as the grave closes over your loved one, ma'am?"

To his signal relief her answer was a hysterical "No, thank you!" So he hastened back to Dan and together they finished the obsequies with neatness and dispatch. By the time they got back to camp they had recovered their spirits to such a degree that they decided to shift the burden of his demise to the late lamented himself. They argued that if he had only stayed where he was he would have been all right.

"Him jumpin' out in front of it that way," declared Long Shorty, "it looks to me like mebbe he was a mite dee-lirious with thirst an' a-contemplatin' suicide."

Dan had observed a desert water bag filled with water swinging at the side of the car; nevertheless, he endorsed these sentiments heartily.

"I support it ain't no use a-huntin' up that boulder we rolled to see which side she turned up?" suggested Long Shorty.

Now, Dan was the loser to date, in consequence of which he could not, with honor, appear to accede too eagerly to the philanthropic proposal. If it ruined him he could not appear to be a welsher; so he halted abruptly and glared at Long Shorty.

"Wa'al, hardly!" he snapped. "Just becuz the stone hits this stranger ain't no reason as I can see why we got to 'low it's cocked dice an' call the bets off."

"Suit yourself," Long Shorty answered; and they returned to examine the rock.

It lay clean side up, and Long Shorty Ferguson was the sole proprietor of the Big Strike—when they should discover it.

"I hope this ain't a-goin' to make no difference between us, Dan'l," Long Shorty suggested, a little regretfully.

"If you can control yourself, Long Shorty, I guess I can," replied Dan Purdy meekly. "Which bein' the case, let's harvest our whiskers an' wash up."

They returned to the camp, where Dan stepped to the tent flap and peered cautiously in. The widow, exhausted from her recent tragic adventure as Mr. Purdy presumed, but in reality lulled to oblivion by Mr. Ferguson's great cure-all, slumbered soundly; so Dan tiptoed in and stole his own bag and his partner's. A tiny mirror and shaving outfit were brought forth and the hirsute harvest commenced.

Satisfied at last that they were half-way presentable, the two partners next examined the baggage of their guest and discovered a small forest ranger's tent with a folding camp cot and a wool pad. This outfit they set up and prepared for the widow, after which they

cooked supper, ate it and sat round in stony silence, spitting tobacco juice into the fire and watching the moon rise over the Charlestons. And presently their guest stirred and came forth.

She was a thin, angular person possessed of few physical charms. The natural severity of her face was accentuated by the manner in which she drew her hair back at the sides and fastened it in an old-fashioned French roll in the rear. A faint color glowed in her cheeks; her dark eyes were as bright as shoe buttons and as cool as an absinthe frappé. Long Shorty decided that if their unbidden guest had been born a man she would have been a banker or a faro dealer.

Dan had some fresh water in the coffee pot and he now set the pot on the fire.

"Mebbe, ma'am," he said respectfully, "you might have so far recovered your sperrits as to feel like tyin' into some fodder? A cup o' coffee an' a mutton chop an' a stack o' flapjacks would about hit the bull's-eye, I reckon."

"And don't you go to squattin' an' snortin' at Dan'l's flapjacks, ma'am," Long Shorty cautioned her, "becuz they're about six pounds lighter'n they look."

After supper the widow appeared to have recovered her spirits. She showed a disposition to talk. Dan and Long Shorty were quick to encourage conversation, feeling that it would tend to keep her mind from straying to the tragedy of the forenoon; so they plunged into the conversation with an animation that was ordinarily foreign to their natures, for, as we have already endeavored to explain, there is something about the vastness, the solemn silence, of the desert that is not conducive to conversation among those who dwell in it. Something of the desert's own grim, inscrutable personality is developed in her children; and Dan and Long Shorty, whose natures had long since become

attuned to the surrounding country, often went days at a time without speaking to each other except when absolutely necessary.

Nevertheless their companionship was perfect, for subconsciously they respected each other's moods and divined each other's thoughts to such an extent that never were they to any extent unsociable in their taciturnity. Unlike the widow, conversation with them was not a ruling passion; consequently her high, precise tones were not long in creating a discord in the perfect harmony of that desert camp.

Mostly she asked questions. She delved into their past from the cradle up to the moment when the rolling boulder had gathered her mate into the bosom of Abraham. She made it her business to ascertain their business—what they were doing there; who sent them; how much money they were making; and the nature of their personal ambitions. She asked if they believed in suffrage for women, and they, fearful of offending her, lied and said they did; whereupon it developed that she subscribed to an opinion that woman's sphere should be limited to the home, and berated them for a pair of mollycoddles. In defense of their lie Long Shorty and Dan were forced to lock horns with her in an argument on suffrage and were routed ignominiously. She noticed that two buttons were off Long Shorty's shirt and said she would sew them on in the morning.

Time and again the partners strove to head her off, hoping she would relate something of interest to them—what she was doing in the desert; where she had come from and why; but they were singularly poor hands at evincing curiosity, no matter how curious they were, and it was impossible for them to shatter their code to the extent of a blunt request for an explanation.

The talk flowed on so pleasantly that presently even

the widow became aware of the incongruity of her action and hastened to mend her fences.

"I sincerely trust," she said, "that if I appear to have already forgotten the terrible tragedy of this forenoon it is due entirely to a philosophical mind, which bids me make the best of every situation, no matter how depressing. I hope you will not ascribe my action to natural hardness of heart. My present attitude is a heritage from my ancestors, and no Beeby can escape it. My great-great-grandmother was a first cousin to Molly Pitcher."

"Don't know as I ever heerd o' the lady," Long Shorty ventured to remark.

"Her husband was a gunner in General Washington's army during the War of the Revolution. At the battle of Monmouth, Gunner Pitcher was killed; but his wife Molly, who was with him, seized the rammer and served the gun in his stead. She was commended by General Washington for her bravery and was made a sergeant."

Dan and Long Shorty exchanged glances that were eloquently expressive of tolerance and amusement, and the widow rattled on.

At length Long Shorty said:

"Might I ask, Mrs. Beeby, if you be expectin' friends to come a-lookin' for you after you're missed from home?"

Since their guest had identified herself as a Beeby, Long Shorty, in the absence of more definite identification elected to call her Mrs. Beeby.

She shook her head sadly.

"I have no friends in California, Mr. Ferguson, unless I count yourself and Mr. Purdy. You are, indeed, friends in need."

"How about the late lamented? What was left of

him looked like a he-man that had growed up in country with the hair on it. Ain't he got no folks in California or Nevada?"

"I did not know his people, Mr. Ferguson. We had known each other but a short time."

"Wa-al," Dan interrupted, "as his widder you're entitled to all his worldly goods; so let's probate his estate." And he produced the few dollars in silver, the pocket-knife, the folding comb and the plug of tobacco he had found on the body. The widow thereupon commenced to sniffle and demand information as to what she was to do, left all alone in this terrible desert; and Dan explained patiently that time alone could tell the story. He was about to enter into a wealth of detail as to why this should be; but Long Shorty interrupted.

"Ma'am," he soothed, "you'd better turn in and git some sleep, an' in the mornin' we'll decide what's to be done."

She thanked them and with a sobby good night took the candle Long Shorty had dug up out of their stores and retired.

Until nearly midnight Dan and Long Shorty sat facing each other in absolute silence across the cheerful sage-brush fire. They were utterly talked out. Presently, however, Long Shorty got up and walked out into the desert a little distance. By no word, glance, or signal had he indicated to Dan Purdy that he desired a conference; yet Dan rose immediately and followed.

"Dan'l," Long Shorty began, when they were out of possible hearing of the widow, "somethin's got to be done." By a discreet silence Mr. Purdy admitted that it was even so. Long Shorty continued: "Dan'l, yore sense o' fair play compels you to admit that in widderin' this here widder me an' you've got to bear an equal burden o' blame."

Dan nodded.

"There ain't no question about that, Charles Wilfred—only I'm a-thinkin' that, after sharin' all we've had equally for twenty years, it sorter looks like this here widder's the one thing we ain't a-goin' to be able to share. I'm willin' to admit she's a problem, an' half o' that problem's mine; but when it comes to drawin' the dividin' line an' a-carin' for this aged canary I got to admit, Charles Wilfred, I'm a-fannin' the air an' a-beggin' for help."

"That's logic, Dan'l. It shore looks to me like the only thing left for me an' you to do is to toss a dollar to see who'll shoot her an' git her off our hands. We've beefed her husband an' left her alone in the world, without money an' nary a soul to turn to. We can't git shet o' her until somebody comes an' takes her away—an' nobody's comin'!"

Long Shorty smote his aching brow.

"Yes," he supplemented Dan's wail; "an' me an' you can't leave this country to pervide for her. Even if one of us was to go out with her, we ain't got nary critter for her to ride an' pack water for the trip, an' with them toothpick shoes of her'n she might just as well be wearin' hobbles. Dan'l, we're just nachelly marooned with this screamin' cockatoo till April."

Ensued a long silence. Finally it was broken by Long Shorty.

"Mebbe she'll ease up on her talk before then," he ventured, hoping against hope. "She's wearin' on a man's nerves; but still, as the feller says, a new broom sweeps clean, an' I got a notion, Dan'l, she just plumb talked herself down to bed-rock tonight an' won't have nothin' left to talk about tomorrer."

"I don't give a damn what she does tomorrer, becuz I'm goin' a-prospectin' up on that hill," Dan blazed

profanely. "It's a-thinkin' o' tomorrer night that makes me scairt. Still, the talk ain't the wust, by no means; though I'll bet a forty-dollar hat if you was to go pan-nin' for conversation on that female forty years from now she'd assay a thousand words to the ounce. What's gravelin' me, Charles Wilfred, is the fact that she's a respectable widder woman; an' you know just as well as me that it ain't in the book for a respectable widder woman to spend two months in camp with two unwedded old sourdoughs like me an' you without losin' her reputation. It's all right if she's got a chaperony," he ended shrilly; "but who in hell wants to be a chaperony?"

"Chaperony or no chaperony," Long Shorty protested virtuously, "she's plumb safe with me."

"It ain't that. She's safe with me too; but there's an old sayin' that a feller might as well have the name as the game. Give a dog a bad name an' it's the same as tincannin' him."

"Wa-al, I ain't objectin', if you feel that way. You don't have to 'pologize to me—"

"Tarnation take her! I don't want her any more'n you do."

"Wa-al then, what're you drivin' at?"

Dan Purdy wet his lips, glanced around in pathetic desperation and voiced the awful issue as it appeared to him:

"It's up to one of us to marry her—if she'll have us," he said.

Had Long Shorty been bee-stung he could not have started more violently. He called to his instant aid all coons and catamounts, came close to his partner, and in the bright moonlight stared at him.

"Yes, sir," that desert Puritan went on relentlessly, "for the sake o' the widder's reputation it's up to us

to offer our hand an' heart. We'd sooner be snake-bitten, but we got to give her a chance to say no."

"Why've we got to?" Long Shorty blustered defiantly.

"Becuz we're the responsible parties, Charles Wilfred. Pers'nally I'm free to confess I'm wild an' full o' fleas; but I can put my hand on my heart an' say this much, Charles Wilfred: When it comes to climbin' up the golden stairs, there ain't no angel goin' to stick his head out the door an' say 'Pull yore freight, Dan'l Richard Purdy! While you was on earth you helled round an' cost a good woman her reputation. You killed her husband an' chucked her out on the cold world without carin' a white chip whether she bogged down or not. Now git!'"

It was the final, unanswerable argument. Too well Long Shorty saw its telling force; too well he realized that his implacable doctrine of personal responsibility had tracked him to his ruin. True, indeed, here was a situation he had helped to create—a situation that must be met and grappled with as with a deadly enemy; but he was human, and feebly he sought to evade the issue.

"Dan'l," he pleaded, "this here's an accident, an' no man's responsible for accidents. It's the act o' God. Dan'l. We got to check the bet up to the Almighty, who marks the sparrer's fall. Suppose she does stay—it'll be right hard on us; but then me an' you weren't raised in the lap o' luxury, as the feller says, an' I guess we might manage to stand her, Dan'l. If we treat her like a lady what kick has she got comin'? An', besides, who's goin' to find it out?"

"Everybody, Charles Wilfred! They're bound to. When that Boston engineer comes down in April him an' his gang'll find her, an' you know how a lot o' roughneck Cousin Jacks'll talk an' how fast talk spreads.

Ten year from now folks'll be p'intin' at that pore woman an' whisperin' an' nudgin' each other; an' mebbe one o' them'll say, innercent-like: 'There's the old heifer that spent the winter down in the Amargosa Valley with Dan Purdy an' Long Shorty Ferguson!' Why, Charles Wilfred, we'd just nachelly have to leave the country or kill half a dozen men to put a stop to the plaguin' we'd be subject to."

Long Shorty surrendered. He scratched his ear meditatively and glanced out across the moonlit desert to the stranded automobile standing in the sage-lined trail.

"I wisht to Jiminy I could run that there contraption!" he sighed. "Under ordinary conditions I'd as lief let a side-winder quile up in my lap as ride in one o' the durned things; but to get shet o' that widder I'd tackle anything."

"So," Dan Purdy rambled on implacably, "it's up to us to be men or mice or bobtailed rats. Still, in order to lend a touch o' elegance to our courtin', we can't be in too big a hurry to propose, which the same's tarnation bad taste with the rigger mortars hardly set in on her late husband. I'm for standin' her as best we can for a month, Charles Wilfred; an' mebbe by that time what looks like a affliction tonight may turn out to be a blessin' in disguise. Right now I'll admit I'd a heap rather take pizen than wed that widder woman; but, as the feller says, time works wonders. Mebbe the prospect won't seem so awful when we git right down to the scratch. As the feller says, every cloud has a silver linin'."

"Mine's German silver, 'Dan'l. I ain't got no heart for matrimony; but I never was a man to pass the buck, an' your program seems fittin'. We'll court her together, a fair field an' no favor. If she goes to light I'll jump for a box to set her on. If she starts for a drink

o' water you turn a hand-spring a-gittin' it for her. We're bound to have mebbe an inch o' rain before the winter's over, an' that'll bring out the six-weeks grass, with some flowers, mebbe, down along the Amargosa. We'll take turns bringin' her a posy; an' then about the time she gits to wonderin' who's who an' what's what—"

"We'll roll another rock to see who asks her first," interrupted Dan.

Long Shorty extended his hand. In silence they shook. In silence they returned to camp—and so, like Mr. Pepys, to bed.

As they lay there in the dark tent cogitating over the problem that confronted them Long Shorty heard Dan stiffen in his blankets and raise himself on his elbow, as one who listens for a repetition of some faint portentous sound piercing the silent reaches of the night. So Long Shorty listened also, and presently he heard it too—a steady, rhythmic sound remotely resembling the exhaust of a distant gasoline hoist. He shivered.

"The widder's sawin' wood," he whispered hoarsely.

"An' strikin' knots in every cut," replied Mr. Purdy.

By reason of the fact that his luck had been running unusually strong of late, Long Shorty elected to convince himself that, whatever happened, he, at least, would be safe from that gentle snoring, so he essayed a little banter.

"The bride," he droned, as though reading from the trite account of a society wedding, "wore a magnificent traveling dress o' flour-sackin' an' carried a bouquet o' Spanish bayonet an' niggerhead cactus. Mr. Charles Wilfred Ferguson, the well-known minin' man, gave the bride away to his old pardner, Mr. Dan'l Richard Purdy. Immediately follerin' the ceremony a delightful luncheon, consistin' o' sowbelly, sourdough an' airtight

fruit, was served at the home o' the groom. Mr. an' Mrs. Purdy'll spend their honeymoon at Furnace Creek Ranch—"

"Charles Wilfred," thundered Mr. Purdy in a terrible voice, "I thought you said you wanted we should have peace in camp!"

Long Shorty chuckled and subsided into his blankets; and presently, save for the exhaust from the uvula of the female incubus, silence brooded over that certain piece or parcel of real estate known as the Johnny Mine.

Dan and Long Shorty were up at daylight, according to the habit of their species, and cooked breakfast in frigid silence. The widow did not appear for breakfast until nearly nine o'clock, and both Dan and Long Shorty made a mental note of her leisurely habit and charged it against her account.

The moment she emerged from her tent the two partners instantly abandoned hope. Her very first query demonstrated all too clearly to them that she was wound up for a day of conversation.

She opened the inquisition with a request to know how they had passed the night. Had they slept well? She was so glad. Did snakes ever invade one's tent at night? Certainly! How very foolish of her not to know that the snakes had all hibernated! Did they hear that dreadful howling and yapping going on at intervals during the night? Good gracious! Mercy sakes alive! Coyotes! You don't say! And you didn't hear that racket? Oh, come now, Mr. Purdy, surely you're joking. Is that so, indeed, Mr. Ferguson? You cannot go to sleep unless the coyotes howl? Why? Oh, you're so used to them! I see. But there were at least a hundred of them—Two! Mis-ter Fer-guson! Only two? Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

"If you'll hold down camp," said Long Shorty, unable longer to bear her cachinnation, "me an' my pardner'll take a *pasear* up the hill an' do some work on a prospect we're interested in."

"Pray do not permit my presence to interfere with your work," she chirped graciously. "I see a great many things here to occupy my time until your return. I presume I am quite safe."

"I don't see nothin' or nobody to bother you, ma'am," Dan Purdy growled; and together they started up the hill and in due course reached the mesa.

"Dan'l," said Long Shorty, "there ain't no sense in me an' you both rackin' our souls for a month a-wonderin' who's goin' to be the lucky man. Let's roll a rock right now an' have it over with."

Dan was more than agreeable; so they pried up another huge boulder, rolled it to the northern face of the hill to avoid possible damage to the abandoned automobile at the foot of the slope down which they had previously rolled the other boulders, and sent it on its way. After marking where it came to rest, at Dan's suggestion they decided to remain on top of the hill and prospect during the day. On their way to camp for supper they would visit the boulder and decide their fate.

They went chipping and prospecting round on the mesa, and presently Long Shorty picked up a piece of float. Fifty feet farther along toward the mouth of the cañon Dan Purdy found a nugget of pure gold. It was worth in the neighborhood of five hundred dollars, and instantly the widow and the Johnny Mine were forgotten. They stood staring at each other.

"It's the Big Strike, Charles Wilfred!" Dan panted. "She's up the cañon a spell, an' we'll find her as shore as I owe you half of it!"

Long Shorty's glance wavered and sought the tips of his miner's boots.

"Dan'l," he said in a low, strained voice, "there ain't a-goin' to be no fun in findin' it if you ain't in on the deal."

"Can't be helped, Charles Wilfred. A bargain's a bargain, an' I never was no tin-horn gambler. Somethin' keeps a-whisperin' to me we're a-goin' to find her, Charles Wilfred; but I ain't belly-achin'. I'm your pardner still, Charles Wilfred, an' I'm a-goin' to help you find the Big Strike if she's here."

"Dan'l," Long Shorty replied a little tremulously, "me an' you'd never ought to 'a' gambled thataway. Gamblin' between pardners like me an' you have been is a sin an' a 'bomination in the sight o' the Lord. 'Tain't right, nohow; an' I ain't a-goin' to stand for it. All bets is off. I'd ruther have my pardner than all the gold in the country. You know as well as me, Dan'l, life ain't in havin' the dratted stuff, but in a-lookin' for it an' findin' it."

"It's a open question, Long Shorty," Mr. Purdy replied gently, "whether I'd 'a' been minded to express similar sentiments if the shoe was on the other foot. Sich bein' the case, the bets ride as they lay. Come along, ye danged old fool, an' let's look for the ledge this nugget come from."

"But how about the widder?" shrilled Long Shorty. He was on the verge of tears. "Dan'l, you're takin' a awful resk. You've lost yore interest in the Big Strike; an' I've got a hunch you'll find, when we look at that there rock we just rolled, that she landed my side up, an' you're just nachelly elected to propose to the widder."

"That ain't no sign I'm a-goin' to marry her, Charles Wilfred."

"No, it ain't no sign. It's just what the feller calls a moral certainty. Dan'l Richard Purdy, did you ever hear of a widder refusin'? They just nachelly jump at the first offer; an' if you was to lose your half o' the Big Strike an' win the widder—"

Long Shorty choked up. To him the result was too horrible to contemplate. Dan took him affectionately by the arm and shook him.

"We're a pair o' prospectors, Long Shorty," he said, "not a couple o' durn' fools. Come along!"

So they proceeded up the slope of the mesa toward the mouth of the cañon; and the farther up they progressed the thicker they found the float, until presently, well up the side of the cañon, a reef of white quartz thrust upward a foot through the red, eroded soil.

"It's grass-root stuff!" panted Dan Purdy, and together they dashed up the little slope; together their prospecting picks fell on the quartz ledge; together they picked up the fragments of rock thus dislodged; together their microscopes came forth; together they examined the samples; together they looked up—each at the other.

"Wa-al, Dan'l," said Mr. Ferguson, "we've found her at last; an' she's a humdinger!"

"Yes," Dan replied evenly. "She only runs about three thousand dollars to the ton! The vein's only thirteen feet wide! She's only the biggest thing a man could wish for; an' I'm pleased for your sake, Charles Wilfred. I am, for a fact." And he thrust out his generous old hand.

"I'm a dawg," Long Shorty burst out passionately; "a dirty, low, mangy old pup. To hell with it! If I can't share it with you I don't want it. I won't even stake it out."

He was overcome, and Dan saw that further conver-

sation would be productive of tears; so he waited until Long Shorty should be more composed before he resumed.

"This ain't no way to do business, Long Shorty," he said soothingly. "You say you ain't a-goin' to bother stakin' this claim for yourself. Wa-al, now suppose you win the widder! You'll have won her fair, gamblin' with your old Dan-pardner, the same as you won his half interest in this here strike. You ain't a-goin' to welsh if you win the widder, be you, Charles Wilfred?"

Long Shorty shook his head.

"Wa-al, then, lemme tell you somethin', pardner," Dan continued. "Right now we know where we stand about the Big Strike; but, when it comes to the widder, just who's a-goin' to bell the cat is some news we got a-comin'. Ain't that good logic?"

Long Shorty admitted it was.

"All right," Dan continued; "then let's run our lines an' put up our monuments, an' stake half a dozen claims. When we break the news o' this strike up in Goldfield, or over in the Owens Valley, there'll be a stampede in here; an' you know, Charles Wilfred, there's been more money made in minin'-camp real estate than's been made in mines. We'll lay out the town site off there to the north o' the Johnny Mine an' you can gimme the town site for mine. Meantime let's get busy an' stake this here strike in both our names—"

"Oh, Dan'l, ol' pardner," Long Shorty exclaimed gratefully; "then all bets is off!"

"Nary bit! Remember, we ain't looked at that stone we rolled this mornin'. After we've looked at it I'll like as not have a proposition to unload."

Long Shorty, hopeful that it would be one to which both could with entire honor subscribe, made no further protest. By nightfall they had run their lines, erected

their monuments, and prepared to stake the entire hill in their own names and those of every dependable friend they could think of.

They planned to record their locations at their own expense in the land office at Independence, the county seat of Inyo County; then, without divulging the news of their rich strike, they would prepare deeds to those claims they had staked in the names of their friends, pay the said friends each one dollar for the said claims, and after receiving and recording the deeds the mining laws would be circumvented, as is the custom, and all the locations would be the property of Dan and Long Shorty.

They would then consolidate, incorporate, sell sufficient stock to operate the property, and— But the imagination of the average desert rat never ranges beyond that. Sufficient unto the day is his concept of life.

The names Dan Purdy and Long Shorty Ferguson gave to their claims were reminiscent of recent personalities, animals, and events. There was the Dead Sheep Claim, the White Mule Claim, the Gentle Annie Claim, the Lost Tenderfoot Claim, Big Strike, and, last of all, the Beeby Fraction. Dan Purdy suggested the name in sheer desperation as his inability to think of anything else and not out of compliment to Mrs. Beeby.

Just before dark they returned to camp, dog-dirty and hungry enough to eat a chuckwalla. By mutual albeit unspoken consent they agreed to leave the fateful boulder and its fateful secret until morning.

The widow, clad in a new, clean, starched chambray dress, had dinner cooked and waiting for them. During their absence she had completely overhauled the camp, polished pots and pans, inventoried and arranged their grub supply, and assailed the carcass of the mountain sheep, from which she had cut a rib roast.

It had been many months since Dan and Long Shorty had sat down to a better meal. Usually they drank their canned tomatoes out of the original package, but tonight the widow had the tomatoes boiled and thickened with cracker meal. Also, she had canned soup, which, with roast mountain sheep, roast brown potatoes, pan gravy, hot cakes, and real coffee, soothed and comforted Dan and Long Shorty to a considerable degree. From her own stock of provisions she had supplied a can of pineapple for dessert.

She was unaffectedly glad to see them. Both reflected that the Beeby nature must be powerful, indeed, to permit her to conquer her grief and adapt herself to circumstances which were obviously enough quite new to her. Her strength of character and evident capability and industry quite won their grudging admiration; and when, with the keen intuition of woman, which precludes speech while the male is feeding, she gave her agile tongue a rest, hope, which springs eternal in the human breast, commenced to well up in Dan Purdy's tufted bosom until he made the frightful discovery that no longer were he and Long Shorty the captains of their own camp!

Following the housekeeping habits of all males, neither Dan nor Long Shorty had ever washed a dish or rinsed out a pot after a meal. It was their practice to leave their kitchen and dining-room equipment soiled until the necessity for using it again was apparent, when regretfully they would give it a lick and a promise and let it go at that. Both gentlemen were wont to brag that a little clean dirt never hurt nobody!

Following, therefore, the habit of a lifetime, Mr. Purdy, after inquiring whether anybody wanted any more coffee and being answered in the negative, elected to empty the pot of the remaining coffee and grounds.

In doing this he followed the line of least resistance. Without rising from his seat at the packing box that did duty as a dining table, Mr. Purdy seized the coffee pot and hurled its contents as far from him as he could—which was not very far. Then he carelessly tossed the pot aside, to lie in the sand until the next morning's breakfast, when he or Long Shorty might or might not rinse it out.

To his great embarrassment the widow rose, picked up the pot, washed it at the water hole, wiped it and hung it on a convenient sagebush.

"I can't abide shiftlessness," she explained severely, and Dan and Long Shorty had their lesson.

That night, after the widow had retired, Mr. Purdy walked out into the desert, and Mr. Ferguson followed.

"Wa-al, Dan'l, she's shore a sergeant, like that Molly relative o' hern," began Long Shorty sympathetically. "I noticed her a-takin' liberties with our coffee pot. I tell you what, Dan'l, if we don't train that widder in the way she should go she'll be runnin' our camp for us. Did you notice she set out a pair o' tin cans with some warm water in 'em?"

"Yes, I did, Charles Wilfred. Whatever did she do that for?"

"Finger bowls," replied Mr. Ferguson hoarsely. "Finger bowls!"

"No!" breathed Mr. Purdy softly.

Fell on them one of their frequent long, restful silences.

Then, from Long Shorty:

"Wa-al, Dan'l, you got to admit she cooked a good meal." Long Shorty was striving to be fair to the last. "You got to admit she's a hustler. If you wed the widder, Dan'l, you're a-goin' to get an A-Number-One housekeeper an' no mistake."

"Who in blue blazes wants a housekeeper when half the time he ain't even got a tent to live in?" Dan roared wrathfully. "Not that I'm like the old dawg that can't learn new tricks, but just becuz I'm too old to care to learn 'em. I spent a week in Reno oncet, seein' thê sights—that time you was laid up with typhoid fever at the Miners Hospital in Toquima City. You'll remember we had a stake at the time and I helled round in sassiety a little along o' some o' them high-toned de-vorsays: an' I want to tell you, Charles Wilfred, some of 'em was shore lulu-birds! A-lookin' at them de-vorsays then, I used to wonder what tarnation kind o' he-lizards they married that couldn't be happy with 'em—they all looked that sweet an' pretty! But I know now, you bet! They just nachelly talked an' interfered with their husbands."

"Dan'l," said Mr. Ferguson, disregarding this hark-back to happier days, "do you still figger we ought to wait a month before poppin' the question to the widder?"

"Why, yes," Dan replied, a little mystified. "Whether we pop the question now or a month from now, we got her on our hands just the same. Me an' you, Long Shorty, we give our word to stay here till the first of April, an' we can't send her away, even if she declines our hands. Married or single, Long Shorty, we're elected to live with this talkin' widder until help comes."

"Yes, but a married man has his rights," Long Shorty declared, ominously. "Once me or you gits tied up to this widder, we're in a position to give orders; an' the first order'll be: 'Speak when you're spoken to!' Silence in camp would help a heap."

Dan reflected long and seriously.

"Wa-al," he admitted finally, "one of us has got to make a quick run out, widder or no widder, to file the

location notices on the Big Strike. It's takin' some resk, but mebbe we won't be found out by the Syndicate; an', anyhow, I've got a notion there won't be no claim-jumpin' now that the first o' the year is passed an' the assessment work done by us. The one that goes out to file the locations can git a marriage license at Independence, hire a preacher an' bring him back in one o' them otter-mo-biles. They're dangerous, but people do say you can travel as high as a hundred miles a day in the desert in one of 'em."

Long Shorty nodded.

"I was thinkin', Dan'l, mebbe it ain't such a bad notion to propose to the widder tomorrer mornin'. A-forcin' our hands thataway an' trustin' to luck, I've got a notion that mebbe, on account o' not knowin' us more'n long enough to git a noddin' acquaintance, she ups and deelines our hands. After that we've done our dooty an' the widder's reputation ain't no concern o' ours."

"That's a right good idea, Charles Wilfred," Dan declared heartily. "As soon as we see what that rollin' stone has to say in the mornin', we'll go to it an' know the wust at oncet."

This decision was productive of considerable optimism in both Dan and Long Shorty, and even the widow's snores failed to disturb their rest that night.

Immediately after breakfast they hastened out into the desert to consult the granite arbiter of their fate. It lay soiled side up; and, inasmuch as Long Shorty had staked his luck on the clean side, the horrible truth was born in on him that he was to have the dubious privilege of proposing to the widow. He was quite overcome. He sat down on the accursed boulder and held his throbbing head in his horny hands.

"Dan'l," he groaned, "this fool gamblin' has plumb

ruined our lives! You're out your half-interest in the Big Strike an' I own it all. On t'other hand, you're a free man—an' got to take on a new pardner!"

Dan Purdy laid his hand affectionately on Long Shorty's shoulder.

"Charles Wilfred," he said solemnly, "I told you yester'y I might have a proposition to unload after seein' what luck the rollin' stone brought us. For an' in consideration of a half-interest in the Big Strike I'm a-willin' to assume your resk an' ask the widder first."

Long Shorty stared at him incredulously.

"Why are you willin' to do this thing, Dan'l?" he asked presently.

"Becuz I ain't a-lookin' to change pardners at this late date, Charles Wilfred. If I win her she'll have to accept separate maintenance; an' me an' you—we'll be out in the desert just the same. An' that's the only way I can accept a half-interest—by assumin' your resk."

Long Shorty knew his Dan-pardner. He realized that here, at last, was the only solution to the tragedy that would encompass them should the widow decide to accept the first offer made, and he rose and held out his hand.

"It's worth tryin'," he said, and together they returned to the camp.

Long Shorty, tremendously excited and consumed with curiosity, crawled into their tent under the canvas at the rear and lay there silent, quivering, eager, while Dan approached the widow's tent. She was seated on her camp cot, sewing a button on Long Shorty's shirt, and looked up with her simpering smile. Dan removed his hat and bowed like an aged screech owl.

"Mrs. Beeby, ma'am," he began, "me an' my pardner's been a-discussin' o' your case; an' both of us allow as how you, bein' a lone widder woman without no

friends in this country, an' so far as we know without visible means o' support—dependin' on the cold charity o' this world for help an' sympathy—is in what the feller calls a mighty mean fix."

She bowed her head and nodded briefly while Dan went on to explain to her in detail exactly how matters stood with himself and Long Shorty, and their inability to aid her to return to her people, despite their entire willingness so to do.

"Owin' to circumstances over which you ain't got no control nohow," he added, coming to his desperate peroration, "you find yourself, Mrs. Beeby, holed up here with two old desert rats that's got to plead guilty to every crime in the book 'cept murder, theft, an' tarnishin' the good name of a woman. It occurs to me that you're in what the feller calls a mighty ambeiguous position, an' that the best you git out o' the deal is a reputation for loose conduct. Them's plain words, ma'am; but this ain't no time for back-raisin' the bet on our hand."

"I fully realize the delicacy and unconventionality of my position, Mr. Purdy," the widow faltered; "but I trust the Beeby nature will enable me to live down any scandal—"

"Ma'am," Dan interrupted, "I ain't no hell on looks; but if the honest heart an' corn-kivered hands of a plain prospector with a half-interest in a group o' claims that's going to be worth millions would be any inducement to help you avoid the waggin' tongue o' scandal, you're welcome to Dan'l Richard Purdy. In plain English I'm askin' you to marry me—an' damn 'em all!"

At his earnest speech Mrs. Beeby cast down her eyes and a rosy flush mantled her scrawny neck and face. Then she raised her glance timorously, simpered, and in a perfect agony of ecstasy replied:

"Oh-h-h-h, Mis-ter Pur-dy!"

"That's the proposition, ma'am. Take it or leave it. If you take it I hit the trail for the county seat tonight, an' inside o' ten days I'll be back here with a marriage license an' a preacher an' a weddin' ring. I'm a hell-bender oncet I'm started!"

"But this is so sudden, Mr. Purdy! Really, I hadn't the slightest idea—"

"You've got it now, ma'am. No further room for speculation. I've made up my mind. How about you?"

She rose and stepped timidly toward him. He backed away, slightly apprehensive, as she emerged from her tent. Whereupon she paused, blushed furiously, and favored him with a coy glance, intimating that he might open his arms and claim his own; but he did not understand this, and her reticence annoyed him. He thought she was but striving to blunt the edge of her refusal.

"Wa-al, we won't say anything more about it," he began joyously. "I see I made a mistake; an' I asks your pardon, ma'am—"

"Darling!" she cried.

It was a shrill little note of pure delight. She sprang at Mr. Purdy; her bony arms went round his neck; she strained him to her flat breast. All was over!

"Keno!" groaned Mr. Ferguson, and came forth from the tent to tender his shameless congratulations.

When Dan could disengage himself from the embrace of his fiancée, he sealed the compact in characteristic fashion—he took the widow's hand, pumped it awkwardly, and said simply:

"All right, then, Mrs. Beeby. It's a go!"

"Call me Arabella, Daniel," she pleaded.

"All right, Arabella!" Dan replied dully.

He ignored a flagrant invitation to seal the compact in something more conventional than a mere handshake

and excused himself on the ground of having to make out the location papers for their claims, cache them in the monuments on the hill, and prepare duplicates for filing in the land office. He was not desirous of tarrying to taste of the Dead Sea fruits of victory; so he turned his back on her and entered the tent with Long Shorty, where together they filled in the blank forms of their locations. As they were about to depart for the Big Strike some hint of the proprieties managed to percolate through Dan's agitated mind and he turned to his fiancée.

"Wa-al, Arabella darlin'," he called to her, "I s'pose you're a-goin' to have a nice engagement dinner cooked when me an' Long Shorty comes rompin' in tonight?" Then sotto voce to Long Shorty: "Ain't I the most amazin' old hypocrite you ever heerd tell of?"

Arabella's plain features lit up with a smile that was singularly wistful. She blew him a kiss and said:

"You wait and see, Danny boy!"

Mr. Purdy moaned in his wretchedness and commenced the ascent of the hill. Long Shorty followed. Within the hour they had completed the caching of their location notices in the monuments; and they spent the remainder of the day prospecting up the cañon, for Mr. Purdy lacked the courage to return to the scene of his triumph, and Long Shorty, intuitively realizing that now, of all times, Dan Purdy required the comforting presence of his partner, resolutely refused to desert him.

"I s'pose she'll be expectin' a true lover's kiss when I git back," Mr. Purdy complained drearily. "Whatever would you do if you was in my place, Charles Wilfred?"

"I'd let the tail go with the hide, Dan'l. I'd kiss her! Might as well play the game like a sport, now she's accepted you."

Mr. Purdy sighed ponderously. Nevertheless, he accepted Long Shorty's advice; and on their return to camp for dinner, when the widow approached him shyly he tilted her chin and implanted a light kiss on her cheek. Her bright little dark eyes beamed love and adoration, and Mr. Purdy wondered whether the Almighty did not reserve a special hell for such as he.

The widow had prepared another excellent dinner, to which the partners did ample justice. Immediately after the meal Dan prepared for his journey out to civilization, though he had some little difficulty in overcoming the widow's objection to a start at night. However, since it would be moonlight practically all night and Dan could make faster time than during the day, her consent was finally won. Dan packed some food in a canvas bag, filled two canteens with water, shook hands with Long Shorty, took a hurried, embarrassed and pseudo-affectionate farewell of Arabella, and departed into the soft hush of the desert night.

As the crow flies he had approximately eighty miles to travel; but he had to cross the Funeral Range, Death Valley, the Panamints, and the rolling hills between them and the Coso Range, down the Cosos, and up Owens River Valley to Independence, and this necessitated long detours that would almost double the distance. It was a journey that would have appalled many men; but to Dan Purdy, who knew his private estates so well, it was less than nothing.

Back at the camp by the water hole that night the widow listened, blushing pleasurably, to the reiterated and wholly insincere congratulations of Long Shorty Ferguson. He related many anecdotes calculated to impress her with the sterling character of his partner and spoke alluringly of their joint fortune on the hill. He fondly hoped she might return his confidences, now

that she was one of the family, so to speak; but for all his craft in leading questions she retired to her tent that night without having divulged her family history. Long Shorty sought his own virtuous couch feeling very lonely and disheartened and cursing the day a cruel fate had foisted her on them.

Now that Dan was irrevocably engaged, Long Shorty deemed it the part of propriety to stay round camp and keep the widow company during his partner's absence. As a result he was all but driven insane by her seemingly inexhaustible line of conversation until at last, on the third day, unable longer to endure her, he climbed the hill to the Big Strike for a little peace and pleasurable prospecting.

Here, during the course of his operations, he happened to glance down into the Valley of the Amargosa, and in a vista of brown desert, miles away among the Charleston Buttes, his attention was caught by a little white cloud of dust moving rapidly across it and coming toward him. It required no great amount of cogitation on Long Shorty's part to convince himself that visitors in an automobile would shortly arrive.

For about five minutes he stood there on the hill, his hand, after the fashion of the desert rat, shading his eyes from below instead of above. He was thinking hard; and suddenly, as the reward of his labors, the Great Idea popped into his simple old brain.

Necessity is the mother of invention, as we have once before remarked, and, given an ally in the shape of the feeblest of forlorn hopes, Long Shorty Ferguson was not the man to surrender without striking one mighty blow for Dan Purdy's freedom; for Long Shorty loved his partner as never brother loved brother, and, all the handshake agreements on earth to the contrary notwithstanding, he would not stand idly by and see that

honest heart offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of duty.

Also, he was alone with the devil now, free from human espionage and the steadying effects of Dan's puritanical presence; wherefore it is small wonder that honor and duty and chivalry to woman fled the Ferguson brain.

His triumphant "Ya-hoo!" rent the empyrean; his disgraceful old sombrero went sailing skyward.

"Dan'l," he murmured, "if them folks in that there otter-mo-bile is half human I'll save you yit!"

He met them a mile out in the desert—two men in a huge, chain-driven ninety-horse-power roadster, breaking a trail through the clinging sage and sand. Ensued half an hour of very earnest conversation; and then the big roadster stayed where Long Shorty had halted it, while that arch conspirator betook himself to the camp. As he went he expressed his entire satisfaction with the universe in a joyous rendition of a border ballad more popular than proper.

Along toward sunset of the eighth day following Dan Purdy's departure afoot for the county seat that candidate for hymeneal hara-kiri returned to the locus of his labors in an automobile. He was accompanied by the shepherd of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Independence, a sturdy gentleman, native to the soil and one to whom a trip into the Death Valley country meant no more than a journey to Los Angeles. With the exception of the five-hundred-dollar nugget, which Mr. Purdy had given him in advance for his professional services, all the world was rocks and dirt to this parson; and he was here now in a hired automobile, a little dusty and skin-cracked, but willing and bubbling with enthusiasm for the task before him.

Long Shorty was roasting a sage-hen over the camp-fire when Dan Purdy chugged into camp with the parson. He looked up calmly.

"Howdy, parson?" he saluted. "I'm right glad to see you. Peel yore overcoat an' wash up, an' by that time this here sage-hen'll be done an' you can tie into her." And without paying the slightest attention to Dan he resumed his air of watchful waiting over the rapidly browning carcass of the fowl in question.

Mr. Purdy descended stiffly and walked over to the fire.

"Well, Long Shorty," he saluted, "you all talked out?"

"I be most rekiwered by now, Dan'l. I been alone goin' on four days."

"Why, wherever's the widder?"

Long Shorty turned the sage-hen carefully, jabbed it with a fork to test its condition—and said nothing; wherefore Mr. Purdy realized that any further discussion was inapropos. The parson, however, was impatient to meet the bride, and the total absence of the party of the second part piqued his curiosity to such an extent that presently he ventured to inquire into the matter.

"Parson," replied Long Shorty, "you're askin' me whatever becomes o' the lady Dan brings you out here to jine to him in holy wedlock." He turned the sage-hen slowly and jabbed it once more before continuing. "Parson, as a ree-ligious man, I take it you're tolerably familiar with the ways o' the Almighty. Did you ever know Him to tell you somethin' you wanted particular to find out? If you did you'd better ask Him about this here bride o' Dan'l's. All I can say is that Arabella lit out o' here in an otter-mo-bile an' she ain't a-comin' back. Whatever's become of Arabella the good Lord

only knows. He won't tell an' I don't give a hoot! Better git your mind an' your mouth on to this sage-hen, parson; an' as you an' Dan'l must be wore out after ridin' this far we'll hit the bunk early, so's you can git up early. When you leave to go back Dan'l'll give you another nugget, the inference bein' that for an' in consideration o' the same you plumb forget you ever heard o' Dan'l and his engagement."

"I believe I comprehend," the parson said solemnly. "Fork over a section of that sage-hen, Long Shorty."

The volleying of the open cut-out on the parson's car as he headed back to his flock in Independence was still plainly audible when Dan Purdy turned to Long Shorty for an explanation.

"Whatever have you done with my bride, Long Shorty?" he demanded eagerly; whereupon Mr. Ferguson sat down and commenced the longest speech of his entire career.

"Widder!" he snarled scathingly. "Widder! Huh! Dan'l, that female ain't no widder. No, sir! None whatever! She's an old maid!" Mr. Purdy quailed and winked rapidly, as though somebody had struck at him. Long Shorty went ruthlessly on. "She's more'n an old maid. She's the Boston Syndicate!"

"Great sufferin' bull snakes!" Mr. Purdy gasped weakly. "Me engaged to wed the Boston Syndicate! 'Tain't possible."

"'Tis possible. More'n that, it's a fact. If you'd wedded that lady, Dan'l, you'd have controlled seventy-five percent o' the stock in the Johnny Mine; an' since me an' you did the assessment work on it, you know the least that means is a million dollars alone, besides her other property. Yes, sir, Dan'l; that Beeby female is worth nigh onto three million blue chips, with all the

ore in sight an' blocked out. Tyin' up to her shorely beats prospectin' all to glory! Just think, Dan'l, how clost you come to payin' yourself your own wages for your winter's work! Yes, sir. Arabella's shore pay dirt from the grass roots; but, as the feller says, all is not gold that glitters; so I took it on myself to git shet of her."

"Gawd bless you for that, old pardner!" Dan breathed fervently. "What next?"

"Wa-al, it seems this young feller that represents the Boston Syndicate and sends me an' you down here to do the assessment work gits a notion that he'd better git shet o' the majority interest or he's liable to lose his job. They're a-pawin' the earth an' bellerin' for his resignation; so he thinks he'll go back to Boston an' line up this rich Miss Arabella Beeby to buy out the kickers an' git control. Arabella's his aunt. She's just turned the forty post, everythin' bid an' nothin' offered—an' her just plumb crazy to git married. It don't look to Arabella like she's goin' to rest easy in her grave with O. M. chiseled on her tombstone; an' she's plumb set on grabbin' off some kind of a man before the prunin' knife o' Time cuts her down, as the feller says. But, aside from these here yearnin's for a mate, Arabella's there like a bank president when it comes to business affairs; so when this boss of ours spreads his hand she 'lows as how it might be well for her to take a trip West and mebbe kill two birds with the same stone. She hears as how women's scarce in the desert an' men plentiful, an' figgers as how mebbe she stands a fightin' chance; besides which, she 'lows she ain't goin' to drop no hundred thousand dollars down the Johnny shaft until she has a look at it herself.

"Wa-al, Dan'l, she don't confide none whatever to her nevvys—just tells him she'll think it over, an' the

minute he leaves her house she's a-streakin' it for the railroad station; an' in the course o' time she lights in Goldfield, with her otter-mo-bile in the express car an' her private chuffer in the tourist coach. Right away she begins prospectin' for p'inters on the best way to git down into the Amargosa Valley. Some good-natured feller gives her the gentle hint as how it's safest for her to leave her Boston chuffer behind an' hire a native that knows the trails an' water holes—which she does; an' that's the duffer we eliminates with that rolling rock.

"Wa-al, Dan'l, three days after you've left I'm up on the mesa projectin' round when I spot an otter-mo-bile down among the buttes a-comin' my way to beat four of a kind; and in a second I have a vision o' that bogus widder a-streakin' back to Goldfield, leavin' me an' you in peace. So I goes down an' meets that otter-mo-bile a mile outside o' camp.

"Dan'l, it's the Syndicate engineer an' Arabella's Boston chuffer! It seems when our boss gits back to Goldfield he finds his maiden aunt's name on the hotel register; later he meets her chuffer in the Casey Bar an' the secret's out. O' course, him knowin' me an' you're down at the Johnny, he don't worry none about the mine gittin' a black eye when the ol' gal comes prospectin' round for information, but as time wears on an' Arabella's overdue on the return trip the boss gits anxious; so he takes his own otter-mo-bile an' her chuffer an' comes poundin' down here to see whatever's become o' his aged relative. They git news of her at Furnace Creek an' are a-follerin' her when I halts 'em an' gits the whole story.

"'You seen anything o' my Aunt Arabella, Long Shorty?' he says.

"'Seen anything o' her!' I says. 'Boss, I've seen too much o' her.'

“‘Wa-al,’ he says, ‘sing the song or tell the story.’ An’ I unloaded.

“He like to ‘a’ died laughin’. Seems as if he seen somethin’ funny in it; but after a while he braced up an’ said it was a durn’ shame to see you deceived that-away. An’ I ‘lowed as how if he’d stand in we’d fix up a little rannikiboo on the bride an’ git you a absolute divorce. He was agreeable; so I unfolds my scheme an’ he puts the finishing touches on it, until she shore looms up like a work of art!

“After we’ve gone over the details an’ got ‘em all squared round in our heads, I mosey along back to camp. I’m there mebbe half an hour, a-chinnin’ with the widder on a low-grade proposition she calls the doctrine o’ determinism, an’ labor an’ capital, an’ somethin’ else that she calls sabotage—though I never et none of it myself—when the boss an’ the chuffer come rackin’ along in the otter-mo-bile. Arabella, she hears ‘em comin’ before they’re in sight; an’ a-fearful o’ her reputation, bein’ seen there alone with me, she lets out a squawk an’ does a high dive for her tent, a-tyin’ the flaps tight after her.

“The boss pulls up right in front of Arabella’s tent.

“‘Wa-al,’ he says, plenty loud, ‘if here ain’t my ol’ friend an’ faithful employee, Long Shorty Ferguson!’ An’ I stepped up an’ we shook hands. ‘Long Shorty,’ he says, ‘whatever got into you that you let Dan Purdy git away from camp an’ lose himself?’

“‘He were for goin’ out on some pers’nal business, boss,’ I says, ‘an’ six men an’ a boy couldn’t hold him! Wherever did you meet the old skunk?’

“‘Long Shorty,’ he says, very quiet, an’ a-layin’ one hand sympathetic-like acrosst my shoulder for the benefit of Aunt Arabella, who’s a-peerin’ at him from the slit between the tent flaps, ‘I’ve got some awful bad news for you about yore pardner!’

"I could hear Arabella a-swallerin' that, but I don't let on none whatever. I just says, excited-like:

" 'Why, whatever's the matter o' Dan'l? When he left here he was that happy an' cheerful it'd done yore eyes good to look at him. The Boston Syndicate ain't gone bust owin' me an' Dan'l our wages, be it?'

" 'Worse'n that, Long Shorty!' he says. 'Worse'n that! Ol' Dan'l's went an' cashed in his chips an' set back from the game forever. You ain't a-goin' to see yore ol' pardner no more, Long Shorty. We planted Dan'l at Furnace Creek last night.'

" 'You don't mean to tell me Dan'l's a goner!' I says, low an' horrified, an' a-grabbin' on to the side o' the otter-mo-bile for support. 'Pore ol' Dan'l!' I says, commencin' to cry. 'He were the only pardner I ever had!' An' I gits out my bandanna an' blows my nose like a mu-el smellin' Injuns.

" 'Yes,' he says, 'ol' Dan'l's went before. Brace up now, Long Shorty, an' take it like a man. Seems like Dan he comes a-staggerin' into Furnace Creek Ranch on the evenin' o' the eighteenth, just a-burnin' up with fever an' out o' his head. The folks at Furnace Creek gets him into bed an' feeds him a quart bottle o' whisky an' quinine, an' bathes his hoofs in hot mustard water, an' does everythin' in reason for him; but it sorter seems like he's too far gone. In spite o' everythin', pore Dan'l develops pneumony in both lungs an' kicks the bucket yesterd'y mornin'. We happen along about an hour before his sperrit takes its flight; an' when he hears I'm at the ranch, he sends for me an' tells me to give you what wages he's got a-comin' from the Johnny people. Seems, too, as if he had a last message he was a-honin' to send to somebody he loved—his sister, I guess. He give it to me, with instructions to give it to you, Long Shorty; an' you was to carry it whar it belonged.'

"Wa-al, Dan'l, it seems like the widder's fuse has about burned down to the fulminatin' cap by this time, an' she blows up with a loud noise. She just lets out one devastatin' screech: 'Oh, Danny, my beloved!' An' then she bogs down on her bed an' kicks her heels agin it like a ten-stamp mill an' falls a-blattin' an' a-sobbin' an' a-sniffin' like a old air-compressor with sand in her valves.

" 'Whoever's makin' all that to-do?' says the boss; but, o' course, I'm too broke up to answer, so he gets down an' looks inside the tent.

" 'Why,' he says, 'if it ain't my dear ol' Aunt Arabella!' An' he picks her up an' wants to know whatever is she a-doin' there in a camp with a dad-burned ol' prospector without no chaperony!

"Dan'l, mebbe she didn't come to at that! It takes a long acquaintance an' a heap o' grief to make a old maid forgit she's triflin' with her reputation—more particular when one o' her kin happens round an' catches her in a embarrassin' pree-dicament. She sets up, wall-eyed, like a nigger seein' ghosts, an' fer a minute she hasn't nary a word to say, even if her nevvv gives her time—which he don't.

" 'You don't have to tell me nothin'!' he yells. 'I know the worst. Them two ol' skunks has waylaid my Aunt Arabella. One of 'em's dead; but I'll make the family honor clean again. I'm a-goin' to start in by killin' that low-flung, wuthless man Ferguson!' An' he comes b'ilin' out o' that tent with his gun an' whangs away at me, a-settin' sobbin' on the box by the fire. O' course I takes to the sage, an' he follers, bangin' away, with Arabella a-follerin' him an' a-beggin' him not to kill me.

"When his gun's empty I draw an' cover him; an' then she's a-beggin' me not to kill her nevvv.

"Play-actin'? I should tell a man! Dan'l, I just plumb

missed my vocation! I'm a-holdin' down on the boss, an' him with both hands up, foamin' an' tremblin'; while Arabella, she tells the long, sad story. Her nevvyy kisses her an' says he's sorry he acted hasty, an' asks me to shake hands an' forgit.

"'Boss,' I says, "I ain't got nothin' to forgive an' forget. I allers honor a man that honors his family honor.' An' I finned him, an' all hands set down to talk it over.

"Arabella, she's pretty much broke up an' goes to her tent to cry some more; an' when I judged her milk-dewed ol' heart had plugged along an hour without breakin' I look in on her an' say:

"'Arabella—you'll excuse me for callin' you Arabella, but since you're the promised bride o' my best friend an' pardner for twenty years, an' him dead an' gone, mebbe it ain't such a liberty after all—before Dan'l hit the trail for the Great Not Yet he leaves a message. "Tell Charles Wilfred," he says, "to hoof it along the best he can without me; an' tell him to tell my darlin' I kissed her in sperrit, an' my last thoughts was of her.'"

Long Shorty paused to bite into his chewing tobacco, the while he glanced at his partner as though he expected some slight evidence of the latter's appreciation of his histrionic genius; but Dan only stared at him, fascinated and pop-eyed, and presently Long Shorty took up his recital again.

"Wa-al, Dan'l—to git right down to bed-rock—the chuffer takes Arabella's things an' puts em' in her ottermo-bile that afternoon, an' lights out ahead, forty mile an hour, for Furnace Creek, with instructions to wise up all hands at the Ranch about yore death, how you died, an' what all; an' to fix up a little pile o' fresh

dirt like a new grave under one o' them weepin' willer trees along the creek an' nail a board with some fittin' inscription on it to the tree.

"We gives the chuffer a good start; an' then the boss an' Arabella says good-by, with Arabella vowin' you're her hero. She 'lows she'll light at Furnace Creek to plant a rose on yore grave an' water it with her tears.

"Dan'l, I'll take an oath before the district recorder, if that old human phonygraft ain't happier'n she's ever been before, I'm an ore thief! She's gone away exultin' in the thought that oncet she had a true love an' lost him; an' she says to me at partin':

"'Charles, "'Tis better to have loved an' lost than never to have loved at all.'"

"'Right you are, Arabella!' I says. An' dang my wicked heart, Dan'l, I felt like a dog caught suckin' eggs. I wisht there'd been some other way o' savin' you, but desperate circumstances requires desperate measures, as the feller says; an' I wasn't takin' no chances on havin' Arabella light on me for a substitoot. Still, Dan'l, a man might 'a' done wuss. Though Arabella's one o' these old damsels that's got to the p'int in life where they're plumb desperate an' willin' to snatch at the tail feathers o' anything respectable that's white an' flies by in pants, still, I've got a notion she'd 'a' been kind to you in her way, Dan'l, an' played the game like a sport, red or black."

"What else did she say?" Dan demanded eagerly.

"Wa-al, she said you was only a plain, uneddicated prospector, but you was a rough diamond set in twenty-four-carat platinum; an' when it come to real old-fashioned chivalry to women she'd pick a man an' let somebody else have the gentleman."

"Huh!" said Mr. Purdy, and thereafter said no more until late that night when he and Long Shorty faced each other across their camp-fire.

For hours they had sat in perfect silence, each old brain busy with its own particular daydreams. The vagrant night wind brought a tang of sage and greasewood to mingle with the aroma of the wood smoke; afar in the dim starshine the jagged Funerals brooded like grim guardsmen over the Valley of the Amargosa; from a distant butte a coyote gave tongue to its primeval plaint of famine; and over the mystic souls of Dan Purdy and Long Shorty Ferguson, to whom twenty years in the desert had brought a subconscious appreciation of the littleness of man and the glory of their Creator, there slowly settled that sublime peace that passeth understanding.

Presently Mr. Purdy stirred slightly and spat into the fire. Long Shorty, knowing Dan was about to speak and vaguely resenting the impending outburst, looked up quickly. He knew exactly what Mr. Purdy was going to say and he was prepared to wither him.

"Charles Wilfred," said Mr. Purdy, "that was an evil deed you done! You saw me fin Arabella when she accepted me, an' then you turn right round and make me bust a handshake agreement. An', what's wuss, you got me hog-tied, an' I got to stand for it!"

"Shet up, you chatterin' magpie!" Mr. Ferguson retorted ferociously. "You're dead!"



